



**SENSE IN SEX**

**AND**

**OTHER STORIES OF INDIAN WOMEN**

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# SENSE IN SEX

AND

OTHER STORIES OF INDIAN WOMEN

BY

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*"In the Clutch of the Devil" etc.*

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**TO  
MY DEPARTED BROTHER  
DHARMARAJAN**

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Your life was one of sacrifice. Before you could take rest, Nature took you to her bosom. To you who were representative of India's best I dedicate these stories from Indian life.



## **PREFACE**

**These stories are true to Indian life especially of the South, the most characteristically Indian portion of this great country. Though all the characters and incidents are, of course, wholly fictitious, they are such as can be easily met with in real life.**

**A. S. P. A.**



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## SENSE IN SEX

**S**ADASIVA was a married man with three children, two boys and a girl. He loved his wife and children passionately, and till he arrived at the critical and dangerous age of forty had never been guilty of any infidelity to his wife. He had been married at the age of eighteen to Yasoda, who was then only eleven years old. Their parents had arranged the marriage without consulting them, and they had somehow enjoyed marital bliss. The injustice and iniquity of early marriage had never occurred to either of them, and they had not felt at all that they were in any sense victims. Without reading any book on married love and without knowing what some authors consider that every husband and wife should know, the couple had managed to enjoy married life with keen relish,

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and without driving the husband to immorality or the wife to a nervous break-down. No doubt, modern-minded people will be surprised at this, but so it was. Sadasiva and Yasoda were deeply religious and had not yet learnt that religion was the opium of the people and the seed of all evils. They believed too in some rather wornout ideas of morality, and could see nothing but condemnable immorality in a married woman eloping with another man. Their old-world eyes saw no romance in this. Nor did they consider such a woman superior to one who remained true to her husband in prosaic fidelity.

However, even into their quiet village of Radhapuri, modern civilization began to penetrate slowly, and by the time Sadasiva was forty, papers were freely circulating there. These contained numerous offers from philanthropic gentlemen in all parts of India to

send gratis and post-free certain indispensable pamphlets on sexual bliss, married love, sense in sex, and other kindred topics. Since they were for nothing and were said to embody the latest researches, Sadasiva sent for one of these. He was terribly ashamed to read the obscenities contained in it. It seemed to him that the writer's intention was more to divert and excite his readers by lively descriptions of sexual processes and perversions than to supply any scientific knowledge. Anyhow, as according to the numerous testimonials even westerners were said to admire the book, Sadasiva conquered his shame and went through the book. His passions were excited, and he felt an inordinate craving for more sexual knowledge. He sent for other 'free pamphlets. One thing common to all these pamphlets was their insistence that human happiness consisted solely in sexual pleasures and

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that all diseases due to an immoral life could easily be cured by certain medicines which were always stocked by the worthy pamphleteers. Śadasiva was at times torn by doubt as to whether these pamphleteers were really well-wishers of humanity, not wretches who attempted to profit by a human vice. He tried to read interesting passages from these books to his wife, but that puritanical lady shut her ears with her hands and requested him not to pester her again with such obscenities. Śadasiva felt humiliated. He also felt angry that his wife should have thought herself above reading books which he was reading. This attitude was certainly a kind of vote of censure on him, nay, it was an act of revolution by one who had sworn to obey him always. Even Yasoda's refraining from asking him not to read the books any more, stung him as implying that such a request was not likely to be complied with. Was



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Were his immoral friends really happier? He resolved to go to one of them called Appu and ask him. Appu received the questions of Sadasiva with surprise not unmingled with pleasure, for, if Sadasiva became immoral, he could get something out of him. He gave a glowing account of an immoral man's life and wound up with these eloquent sentences: 'A concubine is superior any day to a wife. She must be constantly pleasing her paramour if she is to keep him. So she makes a special study of sexual science and gives the maximum pleasure. She rarely loses her temper, for she cannot afford to do so. Again, a man's responsibilities as regards her are far less than towards his wife, and, what is more, he can discard her at a moment's notice if he becomes dissatisfied with her.' 'Rubbish!' said Sadasiva. 'Can you raise up worthy children by a concubine, and will she stand by you in ad-

versity as a wife will?'. 'Then keep a concubine in addition to a wife and secure both advantages,' said Appu. 'I am too old to have a concubine', said Sadasiva. 'One is never too old,' replied Appu. 'The Age-bar applies, if at all, only to marriage.' 'But I hate concubines and other immoral women who seduce men for money,' said Sadasiva. Replied Appu, 'There are some concubines with whom money is not at all an object, who go in for paramours merely out of love and remain faithful to those who keep them till death.' 'Are there such? I doubt it,' said the other. 'You will realize it yourself one day,' said Appu, and Sadasiva returned home unconvinced and determined to burn the hellish books which had made him resort to Appu for such immoral consultations. As he took the books, however, he thought it better to preserve them so that one day he might write a book exposing the various fallacies contained therein.

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A few days later, he again began to read the books and to wonder whether, after all, Appu could have been right. The evening being very fine, he set out for a long walk. As he walked plunged in deep meditation, a handsome woman of twenty accosted him and requested his help in searching for a lost cow adding : 'I hope you don't mind helping one who has the misfortune to belong to the dancing girl caste,' 'Certainly not,' replied Sadasiva. 'Such an unfortunate person must be helped all the more.' He spent over an hour in the search, and at last was lucky enough to discover the cow grazing in a lonely hollow to which he would never have dreamt of going but for the girl's suggesting it. The girl, whose name he learnt was Anandi, thanked him profusely and showed her gratitude by falling prostrate before him on the bare ground and embracing his dust-laden feet.

Sadasiva was moved as he had never been before. It was dusk. As he raised the girl he lingered over her a little more than was actually necessary to raise her. She blushed and smiled, not a smile of resentment but of concealed happiness. Somehow, Sadasiva felt a little ashamed, but there was also an element of pleasure in his feelings. 'How I wish I had a protector like you!' lisped the maiden. 'But I am married,' said Sadasiva, for the first time in a tone of regret. 'I shall never love anybody else,' replied Anandi. 'What! Do you mean to say you have begun to love me in so short a time? Why, I met you only an hour ago,' said Sadasiva. 'Ah, what do you know of love, you people who were married like puppets early in life? Between kindred minds love may be generated in a second, and may not be generated in a century between others,' replied Anandi. Sadasiva thought that this

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remark was perhaps true, for his wife had never displayed that intoxication of passion that this girl expressed in her face. Still, he was not going to be a fool, the philanthropic pamphlets notwithstanding. So he said, 'Now I must be returning home'. 'Surely you are not going to leave me in the dark and go away? At least escort me to my house,' said Anandi. 'Where is your house?' asked Sadasiva. 'A mile away' she replied, 'I will lead the way. Please take the cow's halter.' So with the rope in hand, Sadasiva accompanied the fair stranger along country tracks. All the while she was talking of her love for him and describing his various generous qualities. This pleased him. 'My wife is always lecturing me about my alleged shortcomings. But this girl is describing only my good qualities. Perhaps Appu may be right,' thought he. 'Who but you would have aided me in the search and

consented to escort me home and to take charge of the cow? God sent you to me,' said Anandi. For one moment Sadasiva was led to doubt whether it was God or the Devil who had brought about this meeting. 'All your love will evaporate when you find out that I have no money or other property', he said with a view to test her. Anandi, who had been well coached by Appu, replied 'Then my love will increase a thousand-fold. I shall have the privilege of working with my hands and helping to feed my beloved also,' and such a joy overspread her features that Sadasiva was a little sorry for having duped her, and said, 'I was only joking. I am not so poor as I said. In fact I am considered fairly well off.' Anandi's only reply was : 'And you could find it in your heart to dupe me ? I could never have told you such a lie But, then, men are men and cannot be expected to treat

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women as equals worthy of their confidence. Some women cannot understand and make no allowances for men. Hence half the misunderstandings in the world.' 'My wife is that sort,' blurted out Sadasiva, and quickly repented having said it. 'I could see that,' replied Anandi. 'Her unsympathetic treatment has left permanent marks on you.' 'Have they ?' asked Sadasiva anxiously. 'Oh, don't get anxious. I can cure them in no time. The cure for unsympathetic treatment is sympathy. I know how to restore your original nobility of character,' said Anandi. 'Have I lost my original nobility then ?' asked Sadasiva slightly vexed. 'Oh ! not entirely, but still you have lost something by lack of sympathetic treatment. A wise man like you should have wedded a kindred soul,' replied Anandi. 'I was wedded to her when I was a boy, without consulting my wishes,' said Sadasiva. 'That

is obvious', said Anandi. By this time they had reached Anandi's house. There was nobody in the house except her old mother who welcomed Sadasiva effusively, and made him sit down and talk in detail about himself. Meanwhile, Anandi opened a store-room and brought out some fruits for Sadasiva to eat. He said he did not want to eat any. 'Surely, you won't refuse to eat fruits given by me?' asked Anandi, and Sadasiva ate some out of deference to her wishes. He began to feel that the girl's attraction for him was growing and that, if he wanted to escape from her fascination, he must avoid her for ever. Making a desperate effort, he rose and said, 'Now I must be going'. 'So soon?' asked Anandi. 'Please yourself. But just help me in turning this key. The lock seems to be stiff.' Sadasiva went to the store-room door and turned the key and locked the door and l-

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the key to her. Then he took leave of Anandi and her mother. 'When will you come again?' asked Anandi. 'I can't be certain. But I will drop in some time,' replied Sadasiva, mentally intending never to return to this place of temptation.

As he left the house, Anandi told her mother, 'The man has not morality enough to resist my charms when he is in my presence, and wants to preserve his morality by avoiding me hereafter. But, no one has yet succeeded by such mechanical means. He will return tomorrow.' 'How do you know that?' asked her mother. 'I have slyly put the store-room key in his pocket. The idiot will find this out tomorrow and fancy that he had forgotten to give it to me. He will deceive himself into believing that he is coming again to our house only to return the key, and thus satisfy his real craving to come. When he comes, leave

the rest to me'. 'Are you really attached to him?' asked her mother. 'Oh no, but I suppose this idiot is as good as any other, and besides, has more money and less sense than many I know of. By the way he led the cow, I could see that he is the tamest male imaginable. No wonder his wife treats him like a child,' said Anandi. 'How did you know that he would be inclined this way, seeing that he has a reputation for high morality in the village?' asked her mother. 'Well, for one thing, Appu told me that his moral foundations were getting shaky; and then I found the fool reading a ridiculous pamphlet on sexual science with wonder, awe and pleasure,' replied Anandi.

Sadasiva returned home very late. Yasoda asked him the cause for the extraordinary delay. He at first thought of telling her the truth but feared that his wife might put a

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wrong construction on the episode, and so said that he had met a friend and had a long talk with him. His face, however, showed that he was not speaking the truth. So Yasoda asked him 'What friend?'. He got terribly confused, and said 'You know that man—what is his name? damn me—I can't recollect'. 'Very strange that you can't recollect the name of the friend with whom you have been talking for three hours just now,' said Yasoda, fixing him with her penetrating glance. 'Ah, yes, I recollect now. It is Ramalingam,' said Sadasiva. At once Yasoda sent her first child to fetch Ramalingam. 'Hell!' said Sadasiva, 'Don't let the boy call Ramalingam. I was just pulling your leg. I was not talking to Ramalingam.' 'I knew that,' coolly replied Yasoda, 'So with whom were you talking?' 'Surely I can talk with whomsoever I like,' said her husband. 'Of course,' re-

plied Yasoda. 'But where is the need for secrecy?'. Sadasiva kept ominously silent. 'Hullo!' said Yasoda picking a flower from his head, 'Which sweetheart gave you this? Now I understand the reason for your lies and silence,' and her eyes flashed anger. Sadasiva stood confounded. 'The wretched girl must have carelessly dropped this on my head,' he thought, and resolved to make a clean breast of it. But his wife would not believe a bit of his story. 'Don't insult my intelligence', said she, 'I know what really happened. After reading all those obscene pamphlets on sexual science you have gone to that dancing girl's house and misbehaved with her. Oh, that it should come to this!' and she burst into a violent fit of weeping. 'Why did not God take me away before this fall of yours? Perhaps you have been doing like this all along. Only you were cunningly hiding it from me.'

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'Never,' protested Sadasiva, but without the least effect on Yasoda. 'Dearest, don't get unnecessarily angry with me,' said he, and went to embrace and console her. Don't touch me with the arms which have just embraced a wanton,' exclaimed Yasoda, and shrank from him, and went into the darkest room in the house and lay down in a heap crying and moaning. Sadasiva tried to approach and console her but she was inconsolable and drove him away. 'What a ridiculous thing it is that I should be unjustly accused of things I never did ! How can I put this right?' thought he. Then he remembered that one of the free pamphlets had advocated in such situations a pretence to favour the concubine so as to rouse the apprehensions of the wife and restore her affection for her husband. He was wondering whether he should pay a visit to Anandi for this purpose. His

conscience rose up against it. 'After all, the wretched author may be wrong. Such conduct may only estrange the wife more. Besides, the author means a real visit to the concubine for immoral purposes and presumes that the husband would get some pleasure thereby to compensate for the misery at home and thus kill two birds with one stone. However, I don't believe that it is either right or proper for a man to go to a concubine, especially a married man like me. If I go at all to Anandī, it will be an innocent visit, merely calculated to rouse Yasoda's apprehensions and make her drop her resentment. But will the ruse work?' said Sadaśiva to himself. Just then he happened to put his hand in his pocket and found the key. 'What an idiot I am! I forgot to return her key,' said he. 'So, in any case I must go to her house. But I am doing it of necessity and not from any desire to do so, and shall return at once.'

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That night there was silence between husband and wife. The next morning Sadasiva went to his wife and said, 'My dear, you are unnecessarily making yourself miserable. Have you known me these long years without realizing that I am not the kind of man to do such things as you think?' 'Go away!' said Yasoda. 'Many men lead double lives and are saints at home and rakes abroad. You are one of them.' 'Absurdity could go no further,' replied Sadasiva. 'It could,' said Yasoda 'when a married man of mature years resorts to a concubine. Oh, what a hypocrite you are!' 'Nonsense!' said Sadasiva 'You are most unjustly accusing me. A kinder husband has yet to be found in this country. I have never beaten or abused you as many husbands do.' 'I wouldn't have minded that so much as this concubine-keeping of yours' replied Yasoda. 'This is monstrous,' said Sadasiva 'I shall send

for Anandi and you can question her.' 'As if a dancing-girl would betray her lover and the source of her income!' said Yasoda, 'You may as well expect an abettor to betray the principal.' 'I am ready to swear the most solemn oaths,' said Sadasiva. 'What worth are the oaths of a man who has broken his marriage vows?' asked Yasoda. 'You take for granted that I misbehaved with Anandi,' said Sadasiva, 'and are determined to condemn me unheard. Well, then, what shall I do?' 'Get out of my sight and go to your accursed concubine', said Yasoda and shut the door of the room.

Sadasiva stood dazed outside the room profoundly indignant. He now realized the justice of the remark in the philanthropic pamphlets that the worst product of marriage was conjugal jealousy, the most unreasonable passion could think of and wholly absent in the state of freedom advocated by the learned

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authors. At first Sadasiva had laughed at the remark saying 'Jealousy will arise only about valuable things. No man can be jealous about dirt or dust or anything so common. And these authors, when they have abolished marriage, will take away the value of a male or female partner and make them as cheap and worthless as dirt. So, of course, jealousy will go too. But any sensible man knows that jealousy is the reverse side of a valuable quality, moral indignation.' Now he saw that jealousy could exist apart from genuine moral indignation and agreed with the authors of the pamphlets. 'In this wretched house today I shall be subjected to the greatest misery. Besides, I don't think it good for the children to know about these silly quarrels. I shall go to Anandi, give her the key, and return. I must tell the girl what mischief she has been indirectly responsible for, though, of course, it

is ridiculous to pretend that she is responsible for the stupid obstinacy and disgraceful behaviour of my wife. Anandi's only fault is that she belongs to the dancing-girl caste, and would it not be cruel if all decent men refused even the smallest help to people simply because by the diabolical working of an unjust social system they happened to belong to a degraded caste?

He went to Anandi's house with the key and found Anandi conducting a search. 'What are you searching for?' asked Sadasiva. 'Our store-room key,' said Anandi. 'Here it is' said Sadasiva. 'Ah, you rogue, you took it away, did you?' said Anandi, and tightly clasping him said, 'Now I have caught the thief and shall not release him easily, not till he has restored the two things he has stolen from me, the key and my heart.' She had just bathed and decked herself with fresh sweet-smelling

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jasmine flowers. In her rich sari, gracefully draped round her slim arms, she looked a charming figure. And, though Sadasiva was rather surprised at her embracing him so unexpectedly, he was so pleased that five minutes passed before duty could assert itself. He even returned the embrace of Anandi with warmth, and felt nothing but happiness. After five minutes, however, he said 'Anandi, you forget that I am a married man with a wife and three children. Let me go.' 'I forget nothing' said Anandi, 'I shall not let you go till you restore the key and my heart. I want you to forget your married misery for a minute.' 'Sometimes, marriage is certainly a misery,' said Sadasiva. 'But I must not do like this,' and he tried to release himself. 'Stop!' said Anandi, and tightened her hold on him knowing that all the protests of Sadasiva were half-hearted, merely the reaction of his training, and

not sincere. The physical pleasure of the embrace made Sadasiva exclaim, 'This is bliss'! At that moment the door opened and in came Anandi's mother with a fierce expression of uncontrollable anger on her face. Going to Sadasiva she said, 'Wretch, is this the way you seduce young girls? Release her!' and pushed him away from Anandi. Then she embraced her daughter and said 'Poor girl! What was this wicked man doing to you? We shall see that the wretch is exposed unless he makes amends.' Anandi said, 'Don't do anything to him, mother. He is a good man and perhaps did this from excess of passion.' With that she went up to Sadasiva, who was standing petrified with shame, and said, 'Don't look so utterly dejected. Mother has been a bit too harsh to you. That is her way. Give me the key. He held out the key in his right hand which had a beautiful diamond ring on the third

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finger. She took it and said 'What a beautiful ring! I will wear it as a keepsake from you', and slipped the diamond ring from his finger and on to hers. He was about to speak when Anandi's mother said, 'Surely, after such treatment of my girl, you are not going to refuse her even this petty request.' Anandi said, 'Why do you chide him so, mother? He had already promised me the ring' Sadasiva looked astounded. 'I—' he began. 'That is all right, darling' said Anandi, 'Mother is appeased now and will not expose you. Mother, he was about to beg you not to expose him and endanger his honour. You know he is a family man and has to keep up appearances.' 'Sir,' said Anandi's mother to him, 'Your honour is safe in my hands. Now, Anandi, we must attend to household work. Say good-bye to the gentleman.' 'Good-bye!' said Anandi to Sadasiva and went to kiss him. 'Don't

touch me,' said he 'You are a cheat and a wanton. You have robbed me of a valuable ring.' 'You have robbed me of my honour,' said Anandi. 'What honour had you to lose?' asked Sadasiva. 'About as much as you' said Anandi. 'I have been a damned fool', said he. 'You know best', said she, 'anyway, why lament over the inevitable and the irrevocable?' 'Give me back my ring' said Sadasiva 'and I will give you some money. My wife will miss it and suspect how it came to be lost, and that will be the end of all domestic peace and happiness.' 'You value your domestic happiness?' asked Anandi. 'Of course I do ; I consider the worst shrew of a virtuous wife to be heaven itself compared to such as you,' said he. 'Thank you for the compliment' said Anandi trembling with anger. 'But I cannot afford to lose my temper. Pay me a hundred rupees, and take the ring.' 'I shall not pay more than

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five' said Sadasiva. 'After all, what did I do to you? If you won't give me the ring for five rupees I shall recover it by law.' 'Do and wreck not only your domestic happiness and peace but also your public reputation', said Anandi. 'Wretch that you are, you say true', said Sadasiva. 'It isn't worth it. Here take the hundred rupees, and return my ring and promise me you will say nothing.' Anandi accepted the hundred rupees, and her mother took the note inside and brought out the ring and handed it over to him. Then both Anandi and her mother promised secrecy. 'I hope you will come now and then,' said Anandi. 'Not unless I become insane,' said Sadasiva, and left in a fury. 'The plot succeeded very well,' said Anandi's mother to her. 'You are glad, are you not?' 'Of course,' said Anandi. 'I am glad we got the money. But it is no glory to cheat this fool. A more dri-

velling idiot I never saw.' 'Many are idiots when possessed by sex,' said her mother. 'And the sense-in-sex asses are the worst,' added Anandi. 'This fool was steeped in such literature. Anyway, we have done a good day's work.'

Meanwhile, Sadasiva returned home thoroughly sobered. He was anxious to be reconciled with his wife at any cost. He was also heartily ashamed of what he had done these last two days. 'Those wretched pamphlets advocating sense in sex were the cause of all this' said he to himself. 'Their ridiculous exaggerations and pretensions have brought me all this misery and shame. I must burn these sinks of obscenity at once'. Fortunately, his wife was still shut up in the room where he had left her and the children were out at play. Sadasiva slipped into his room and, seizing the pamphlets, tore them to pieces and set

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fire to them. Just then his wife entered and asked in a pleasant voice: 'What is it you are burning?' for she felt on reflection that she had gone too far, and wanted to make amends. 'Those wretched pamphlets on sexology,' said Sadasiva. 'You are offering them as a sacrifice to me, dearest?' asked Yasoda, kissing him. 'Oh, no, a sacrifice involves the destruction of something dear. I loathe these poisonous pamphlets and so their burning is no sacrifice.' 'Don't they teach sense in sex?' asked she. 'No' replied he, 'They simply teach sex nonsense.' 'Then they are absolutely useless, are they?' asked Yasoda tauntingly. 'No, they have been the cause of my recovery of sense in sex,' said he. 'So you admit you lost your sense?' she asked triumphantly. 'Of course, I did when I got those pamphlets and read them. But you are unjust in your suspicions,' said

he. 'Yes, I frankly admit that and unreservedly ask your pardon,' replied Yasoda. Sadasiva was surprised at this sudden change. 'How did you discover your error, dearest?' he asked. 'I sent for Anandi and questioned her severely just now and she replied that you had not sense enough to be immoral. From her way of saying it I was convinced that you were innocent.' 'But you said that you didn't want to question Anandi,' said Sadasiva in surprise. 'That was to prevent your coaching her. Now let us forget this silly episode and be ourselves again', said Yasoda. 'With all my heart', said Sadasiva. Then Yasoda embraced and kissed him and asked his pardon. Anandi, who was watching this through the key-hole said to herself as she went away, 'Even a fool can find happiness provided he holds to his moorings.'

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## THEFT MADE GOOD

**I**T IS RISKY business, dearest; had we not better drop it even now at the eleventh hour?' asked Ramakrishna, a well-built fashionably dressed man of thirty-five now standing at the threshold of his house, to his wife Ganga, a stout woman of thirty apparently advanced in pregnancy.

'Have you no more courage than that?' asked Ganga. 'What is the use of your having a long, curling, sky-aspiring mustache? You long for a child as ardently as I do and know for certain that I can't have one. Then why hesitate?'

'After all, you may have a child yet.' said Ramakrishna. 'Never,' she replied. 'A fat woman like me will not conceive at my age. If I were not barren I should have had a baby sometime during the fifteen years of

our married life. So the only way is the one we have settled upon.'

'But, why not we adopt a child and save all this bother? We could get hundreds of children in that way,' said Ramakrishna. 'Yes, but you can't get a child for adoption before it is five years old, and then it is quite hopeless to make the child ours in reality. We discussed all this long ago. I am doing my part of the business. Why should you shrink from yours?' asked Ganga.

'I know you have suffered frightfully by putting on all that padding and pretending to be pregnant and also eternally keeping indoors feigning sickness and even slight insanity and epilepsy in order to keep away inconvenient visitors. But—'

'No buts. I must be delivered today. So hurry up, for my sake,' and Ganga gazed at

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him from the measureless depths of her eyes and pressed his hand imploringly.

‘But, dearest, will it not be a sin to deprive a mother of her child?’ asked her husband.

‘Where is the sin in taking a superfluous son from those people who are as poor as poverty itself and cannot even feed the two sons they already have? It will be a meritorious act to save this poor baby from a half-starved childhood and a consequent premature death. It is false pride which makes parents cling to more children than they can maintain. The baby’s prospects will become brighter in every way by the act we are contemplating. The parents and the two children and the mother-in-law will also be spared the tragedy of an additional mouth waiting to be filled, out of already inadequate supplies. God cannot but be pleased at our bringing up this unfortunate baby Now, go.’

‘Very well, then. But if the thing miscarries, we will have to face the music,’ said Ramakrishna, and, getting into his two-seater car he worked the self-starter, blew the horn and was off.

‘God grant us success!’ said Ganga as she went inside the house. ‘I hope the wretched midwife will not change her mind. It is a good thing that my husband has not told her who he is.’

At Tirukovur, a village eight miles away from Ramakrishna’s house, Sita, the wife of a poor priest called Seshu, had been delivered of a male child the previous day. As they were poor and as this was the third male child and as, moreover, the house was in an isolated waste, no crowd had assembled to see the baby, and the mother-in-law, Sivakami, had called in the help of a country midwife named Nangi. Nangi and the people of Seshu’s house were practically all who had seen the baby. Nangi

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was an avaricious creature whose poverty had made her ready to stoop to any vice or crime if only she could get money thereby. She was leading a double life. While openly practising as a poor but earnest midwife she was secretly selling noxious drugs for procuring abortion to unmarried women and widows who had become pregnant. So Nangi had no scruples at all, on the way back from attending on Sna, in agreeing with a *Sanyasi*\* (who was really Ramakrishna in disguise) to steal the newborn baby and give it to him for fifty rupees. It must be explained that Ramakrishna had heard about the birth of this third baby, and leaving his car in a lonely jungle by the side of the country road, had approached Nangi whose real character he had learnt, and had struck the bargain with her. The next day also he left his car in the same jungle, put on his disguise

\* A Hindu Monk

and at five-thirty in the evening was lounging behind the priest's house. Half an hour later, Nangi handed over the baby to him. 'I administered a soporific drug to her as soon as her mother-in-law went to bathe, and she has fallen fast asleep. She will not wake up for another hour. Her husband has gone to attend a Vedic recitation and feast and will not be back till ten. Her mother-in-law has gone to the distant village tank with all the soiled clothes, and will not be back till seven and the two older children have gone with her. So my calculations have come right. The little beggar also is sleeping, all unconscious of our acts. How unsuspecting children are! Now tell me who you are, and pay me the agreed sum and a reward.' 'I am a poor religious mendicant and I want the baby in order to bring him up as my disciple. Here is your reward,' said Ramakrishna and gave her sixty rupees and

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quickly departed. Nangi went to her house chuckling. 'It will be impossible for them to suspect me,' thought she to herself, 'as, after giving the medicine, I took leave of Sita and her mother-in-law and went away. My subsequent entry into the house is not known to anybody. I am afraid I have committed a heinous act, but poor people have often to commit sin in order to keep their bellies filled. When a *Sanyasi* stoops to such things, what wonder if I succumb ?'

At half past six Sita woke up and, looking for the baby to fondle it, found it missing. Weak as she was, she rushed out of her room to see if her husband or mother-in-law had returned. There was nobody in the house. The doors were closed and every thing in its place, undisturbed. There was a stillness as in an unoccupied house. 'Where is my baby? Where is my baby?' shouted Sita, rushing to the verandah distractedly. She was scantily

clad and her features were thin and pale. There was nobody in the verandah. She ran to the gate and peered out into the gathering darkness. Nothing could be seen either in the cart-track in front or the winding country road which passed behind the house and joined the cart-track a few yards further. The darkness grew deeper every minute. There was profound silence all round, broken only by the heart-breaking cries of Sita who ran here and there in the neighbourhood of the house. Feebler and feebler grew her cries till at last poor Sita staggered back to the verandah and fell in a heap and swooned. When she recovered consciousness, her mother-in-law was bending over her with a small hurricane lantern and her two elder children were weeping and asking her to get up. 'What is this you are doing?' asked Sivakami sternly. 'Don't you know that you should never come out of your

room for twelve days? And why are you weeping as if a death has taken place in the house instead of the birth of a male child? Where have you left the baby?' 'It is gone—stolen when I was asleep,' replied Sitā weeping. 'Gone? Impossible! You are having delusions' returned Sivakami. But none the less she rushed into the house and examined every room. The baby was not to be found. 'Wretch, did you in your madness throw it into the well?' asked she furiously. Despite her daughter-in-law's denial, she looked into the well but found nothing. 'Somebody must have stolen the baby when I was asleep,' said Sitā. 'Who would steal a baby? Don't be silly!' cried out Sivakami, 'nor is there any devil in this house who could have carried it away. Wretch, why did you sleep so fast?' 'Mother, I think that there must be something wrong with that medicine the

midwife gave me today. I have never slept so heavily before; the sleep too was not refreshing.' 'Don't be absurd,' said her mother-in-law, 'and don't throw the blame on others so as to escape yourself. I must run up to the midwife and ask her to help us.' Then taking the eldest boy with her she rushed to Nangi's house.

Nangi was all sympathy and expressed the greatest astonishment at the occurrence. 'In all my experience of thirty years I have known of only two cases of disappearance, and both were caused by devils,' said she. 'There is no devil near where we live,' replied Sivakami. 'No, but there are two devils at a distance and they must have had some hand in this,' replied Nangi. 'How can we recover the baby?' asked Sivakami. 'From what I know of these devils I am of opinion that it will never be recovered,' replied Nangi, 'and, besides, apart from the tragedy of the occurrence, I don't think

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that you will miss this baby much as you have two children in your house already.' 'You barren woman, what do you know of a mother's heart?' burst out the other, 'come and aid me in the search'. They returned to the house and made another search, this time in the loft, the roof, among the rafters, and the trees as Nangi was of opinion that the two devils she knew might have deposited their victim in any one of these places. When the search was concluded, Nangi said to Sita: 'Console yourself, the devils who have taken the child are beneficent ones and will look after it well.' 'If I could be sure of that it would be some consolation in my misery,' said Sita. 'We can consult our astrologer tomorrow, said the midwife. 'Now let me go.' 'Stop,' said Sita, 'what was wrong with the medicine you gave me today?' Nangi started, but soon regained her composure and asked, 'Why, was it bitter?' 'No,'

replied Sita, 'It made me fall into a heavy sleep in the course of which my baby was stolen.' Another tremor passed through the frame of the midwife but it too was only momentary, and she replied with a laugh, 'Madam, no medicine is required to make a woman sleep soundly who has just had a comfortable delivery. Now I must be going.' As she was going, Sivakami, who had watched Nangi closely, said to her, 'But for the fact that you departed before I went to bathe I should have thought that you stole the baby.' Nangi turned pale but recovered herself and asked: 'May I know the reason for this monstrous charge? Wretched woman, simply because I took pity on your poverty and attended on your daughter-in-law at half the fee, you level this grotesque and diabolical charge against me. I shall never cross this threshold again.' This righteous indignation

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deceived Sivakami. She said, 'Forgive me, Nangi, for what I spoke in haste. Your starting at Sita's simple questions made me say it. I see you are innocent. Pray, don't take it to heart.' 'I forgive you readily, madam,' replied Nangi with dignity, 'for, I can see that both your minds have been unhinged by the disappearance of the baby,' and left the house with a sweet smile of forgiveness. 'I still suspect that woman,' said Sita. 'So do I,' replied her mother-in-law. 'But it is no use accusing her as she bears a very good character in the village. I can only curse my fate. Tomorrow we shall consult the astrologer, but I don't think he can help us much. Now let me go and call my son. I shall leave the two children here. See that they too are not stolen.' After some time she returned with Seshu, and once more a search was made through the whole place.

When it was ended, the mother and son went to the astrologer even though it was night, woke him up, and ascertained from him that the child had been stolen by two devils and that recovery was impossible. 'It is our fate,' said the mother to the son, and the latter agreed. Together they returned to the house and gave a sound thrashing to the unfortunate Sita for having lost the baby. 'If the devils took the baby, how could I have prevented it?' asked Sita of her tormentors. 'The devils would never have stolen it had you been wide awake,' said her husband. 'Nangi caused me to sleep, so she ought to have been beaten, not I,' said Sita. 'But Nangi is not in our control ; so we cannot beat her,' replied her husband, but, none the less he stopped beating her.

Meanwhile, Ramakrishna took the baby home and presented it to his wife and mother. Ganga took the baby and clasped it to her

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bosom with real mother-hunger. She covered its tender face with ecstatic kisses, and laughed and cried and crooned over it. 'I don't care if I am hanged for the crime,' said she, 'for it is worth the risk. Now I must pretend to be delivered.' Going to the apartment arranged for the purpose she lay down, removed her padding, and announced that she had been delivered. Her mother-in-law washed the baby, attended to Ganga, and behaved exactly as if a birth had taken place in the house. Ramakrishna went the next morning into the village which was a mile away and distributed presents to Brahmins and others in honour of the birth of a son and heir to him and was heartily congratulated. That evening some ladies went and saw the baby and the mother. Ganga was on her bed pretending to be very sick. Her mother-in-law was feeding the baby. The room was full of

the smell of the Ayurvedic medicines used by a newly delivered mother. The mother-in-law asked the visitors not to disturb Ganga, and sent them away with the customary presents of betel as soon as they had a momentary glimpse of the mother and child. 'After all, the epileptic woman has given birth to a healthy baby,' said one of the visitors to another as they left the house. 'Perhaps, the epilepsy itself was the result of the child coming so late. Now the mother doesn't look particularly unwell.' 'Indeed, she looks supremely happy in spite of her illness,' replied the other. None suspected the truth. The little baby was brought up in its new home with every conceivable care and was named Balakrishna. Ganga, her husband and mother-in-law all vied with one another in attending to its wants. They loved it like their own baby and it too, having known no other parents, called them mother, father,

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and grandmother when its lips could frame these syllables. Thus a year passed away in unalloyed joy for Ramakrishna's household. As for Seshu and Sita, they had given up all hopes of recovering the child. Seshu and his mother had even ceased to think of the incident though Sita constantly thought of it and wondered where her child was. She had no belief in the stupid devil theory. She had no doubt that Nangi had in some mysterious way taken a hand in the disappearance of the baby and that the child had been stolen by human beings and not by super-natural creatures such as devils. But even she had lost that poignant sense of loss she once had and to a very large extent had reconciled herself to the loss since recovery was impossible. So it seemed as if Ganga was destined to keep the baby for ever.

But time has ever new surprises in store. A year after the coming of Balakrishna into the house, Ganga became really pregnant, partly due perhaps to the new maternal feelings created in her. The months sped by rapidly till the time for confinement came. The delivery was protracted, and a doctor had to be called in. A competent lady doctor named Kamalam was called in. Under her able care Ganga was soon delivered of a sturdy male child. The shrewd doctor was astonished to see that it was Ganga's first delivery. The new baby was also radically different in appearance from Balakrishna. It resembled Ramakrishna closely, while Balakrishna bore no resemblance at all either to his supposed father or mother. Besides, in her labour pains Ganga had told the doctor that she had never experienced such pains before. The physiological appearances too confirmed the doctor's conclusion. She

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asked Ganga suddenly, 'Is Balakrishna your son? Is not this your first delivery? Whose child is Balakrishna?' Poor Ganga shrank from the doctor's penetrating look and half-heartedly said that he was indeed her son. Ramakrishna and his mother were also tackled by the doctor who gave them the reasons for her suspicion. There was no other way for them but to confess the truth and implore secrecy. 'I shall keep my mouth shut if you promise to restore the child to its real parents but not otherwise,' said Kamalam. Ramakrishna and his mother readily agreed, as they felt that, having got a baby of their own blood now it was both unnecessary and injurious to the interests of the new baby to keep the old one. Ganga required a little more persuasion as she really loved Balakrishna like a mother and hated to part with him, but ultimately her husband made her

agree. The question now was how to restore the baby without revealing the crime. Nangi had died recently and on her death-bed had confessed that she had sold Sita's baby to a Brahmin *Sanyasi* for fifty rupees so that the holy man might bring him up as a disciple. This had to some extent comforted the heart of Sita as it assured her that her baby had not been killed. When Kamalam heard the whole story from Ramakrishna she said, 'Out of pity for Ganga and in consideration of the fact that you have stolen the baby only from love and have not done any injury to it, I am willing to hide my discovery and to devise measures whereby you can restore the baby to its real parents without any risk.' 'Pray, reveal your plans,' said Ramakrishna. 'I have a doctor friend at Benares. You go on a pilgrimage to the holy city and return pretending that Balakrishna died. Actually, however,

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you will deliver the child to be brought up by my friend who will receive it under my instructions. 'Of course you will pay for its keep. In three years I will go to Benares and bring back the baby and deliver it over to Sita.' Ramakrishna agreed. Two months after the delivery, Ramakrishna, his mother and Ganga went on a pilgrimage to Benares and other holy places and returned after three months without Balakrishna, stating that the boy had died at Benares. All the neighbours condoled with Ganga whose sorrow at parting with the child was interpreted by them as sorrow at its death.

Three years passed. Kamalam paid a visit to Sita and in the course of casual conversation asked her whether she could recognize her lost baby if recovered. 'Undoubtedly,' said Sita and Sivakami both together. 'It had a mole under the right

ear and another above the right arm pit. Besides, it bore a general resemblance to its father, the nose alone resembling its mother's. 'Well, I am going on a pilgrimage to Benares; I shall search for the *Sanyasi* who stole your baby. If I find him I shall get the baby back from him and restore it to you.' 'Will it be possible?' asked Sita, all her hopes roused once more. 'I can't say for certain that I shall succeed,' replied the doctor. 'But I have strong hopes that with the aid of God I shall succeed.' 'How can I thank you?' said Sita. 'But what if he were to demand the fifty rupees he paid for the baby? My husband cannot afford to pay that price.' 'I shall see to that,' said Kamalam and departed.

A few days later Kamalam left for Benares. After a month she returned with Balakrishna, renamed Dayananda, and showed the child

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to Sita, Seshu and Šivakami. All the identifying marks were on the child which was readily recognised as the lost one by all the three. They thanked Kamalam and asked her how she recovered the long-lost baby. 'You know that almost all *Sanyasis* go to Benares and live there during the holy month when I visited the sacred city. I hunted for the *Sanyasi* who stole the baby and after considerable trouble found him with the child. When I satisfied myself by examination of the child that it was your lost one, I accused the *Sanyasi* of the theft and took the child forcibly from him. The *Sanyasi* cursed me horribly but I told him that his curses would be of no avail against a mother's blessings and went away with the child. He kept quiet from fear of being arrested for kidnapping. And so here is your darling. He is called Dayananda, a beauti-

ful name.' Sita embraced the child fervently and thanked Kamalam again and again. Soon people flocked in great numbers to see the restored child and heard with wonder the story of the recovery which lost nothing in the retelling by Sita and her mother-in-law. Ganga and Ramakrishna also visited the house to see the restored child. As Kamalam had predicted, Dayananda was quite unable to recognize them after the lapse of three years. Ganga gave the child a hundred rupee note and said, 'Thank God, it is recovered.' Sita who had lately made the acquaintance of Ganga, said, 'Your first child and my third child were both lost and we suffered intense agony. My child has now been restored. I am sorry, sister, that yours can never be restored so as to enable you to have the intense joy I feel now.' 'I feel as if my dead child too had come to life, so great is my joy

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at this blessed event,' said Ganga. Then, taking the child and kissing and embracing it, she called it 'Balakrishna' and looked into its eyes with intense affection and tenderness. The child looked back at her with a strange look of wonder, dismay and vacant memory. The onlookers were visibly affected. Then, overcome by emotion, Ganga laid the child down and, giving it another hundred rupee note and a kiss, departed hastily with her husband. 'What a generous and noble lady!' exclaimed Sita as Ganga departed. 'So the theft has been made good at last,' said Ganga to her husband when the car was well on its way to their house.

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## LOVE CONQUERS HATE

**K**OMAN was a respectable farmer with some five thousand rupees worth of property. He was noted all over the countryside for his commonsense and good humour. Wherever there was a quarrel, there he was to be found with his eminently sane advice. Such was his impartiality that both the parties used equally to find fault with him for his decisions and opinions. When their anger cooled they realised how just and sane his advice had been. Koman had a great horror of law courts and the police. He held that any man who resorted to these was bound to come to ruin. Perhaps this was the only respect in which his commonsense was somewhat at fault though none can deny that this view was substantially sound. With Koman it amounted to something approaching a monomania. He had

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never filed a case in either a civil or a criminal court though it had been his misfortune to have been cited as witness in several cases. He always attributed his conviction about the courts and the police to the fate which befell the parties in those cases. 'Rarely does a party stop with a single case. If he wins it, he is encouraged to file another. If he loses, there will be the inevitable appeals and second appeals. In either case, few parties stop till they are utterly ruined. The hosts of false witnesses who gather round the unfortunate doomed men will egg them on so that they may get excellent meals and ample pocket money, and the lawyer with his considered opinions will strengthen their plea. What chance is there for an ill-educated, excited rustic to escape?' was Koman's commonest method of exposition. Needless to say, he was not a

favourite with either lawyers or professional witnesses. With all this, Koman would not have passed a celestial examination in honesty. He had not been known to cheat anybody or perjure for his own benefit. But, where the opponent had uttered lies in order to win the case unjustly, Koman did not scruple to utter counter lies to nullify their effects. So too, even in common life, Koman resented the malevolent curiosity so common in country parts. If he were going to a place and some village crony, out of mere curiosity, asked him where he was going, he would name quite a different place. Sometimes the enquirer would follow to the place indicated, to the great joy of Koman who would exclaim, 'A few journeys like that will break this vicious habit of tracking other people's foot-steps and spoiling their business.' So notorious became this habit of Koman of

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giving wrong places that whenever he named a certain place people concluded that that was the one place he would not go to. When this impression had become firmly established, Koman sometimes used to name the correct destination and confound the calculations of the enquirers. Finally the problem of finding out his correct destination became so difficult that all desisted from asking him where he was going. and ' Koman's destination ' became a phrase in the village to denote one which was unknown. Koman was a shrewd bargainer and always bought and sold his things at more favourable rates than his neighbours. He would never borrow from anybody, nor would he lend. Altogether, he became so prosperous that he was the envy of the neighbourhood.

Koman had no children. He had married once, but his wife had died early, and the

experiment of marriage had not been so successful as to tempt him to repeat it. He had a widowed sister called Nila with a daughter named Kokil. As they were poor and helpless, he took them into his house, and they did the housekeeping for him. One of his weaknesses was a fixed belief in old fashioned diet and habits of dress and an almost ridiculous opposition to modern ideas. He advocated the ancient cold rice or conjee for breakfast and would never hear of coffee or tea and cakes. 'That way lies black ruin of body, mind and soul,' he told Nila and Kokil. 'These fifty years I have lived on cold rice and conjee, and I attribute my good health to it. Never bring coffee or tea here.' So too in dress he was all for the cheap coarse cloths woven in the locality, and forbade the buying of fashionable clothes, whether Indian or foreign. Kokil was a beautiful girl who yearned for costly

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sarees and jewels, and Nila dreamt night and day of good coffee and sweetmeats. Both of them were terribly distressed at Koman's refusal to give any money for the things their hearts longed for. Their disappointment deepened into anger, and anger into a fierce, unforgiving hatred as the days rolled on. 'This wretched miser will never give us a pie,' said Nila to Kokil, 'as long as he lives. He will make us slave for him and then perhaps he will die after us. Even if he dies before us, we shall have reached such an age that we cannot enjoy wealth as well as we could now.' 'He is indeed a hopeless wretch,' replied Kokil, 'he delights in allowing my beauty to go to waste and in making our lives dull and drab. If he takes cold rice or congee and wears rough country fabrics, it is because he likes them. Why should he force us to adopt his taste?' 'Because he has the

money and we have to depend on him for our very meals,' said Nila. 'What a horrid man he is! And all the while he pretends to love us and want our good,' said Kokil. 'So long as he lives we shall have no happiness,' said Nila. 'I wish the f#wretch would die,' said Kokil. 'Few people ever die of mere wishes,' retorted Nila. 'If we want an event to occur, we must help towards it.'

Two days after the above conversation Koman was served with his food at night. Nila and Kokil were all attention and wore loving looks on their faces instead of the usual sullen looks. Koman swallowed the food greedily. 'Tomorrow we shall be free,' said Nila to Kokil, 'and all his money will be ours. It is a good thing that chameleons exist and that their saliva is so effective a poison.' The next day dawned, but Koman was as healthy as ever. In fact he had a new spring in him

and looked as if he had taken a dose of ambrosia rather than poison. His mind had received much relief from the altered looks of his sister and niece the night before. Nila looked at Kokil, and Kokil at Nila. 'The damned chameleons are no good,' said Nila 'The whole vipers' brood deserves to be exterminated. Such a useless lot of parasites I never saw.' Just then a chameleon passed by, and Nila pursued it with a stick and killed it after an exciting chase. 'If you will not deal death, receive it,' said she as the absurd colour changing creature lay dead and could change no more. 'Now, Kokil, stop the coffee-and-cakes man and the cloth merchant. Else, even our paltry meals will be gone and we shall have to beg' Kokil rushed out and stopped those worthies from coming.

'Now what shall we do?' asked Kokil of Nila. 'Give him spring root, the deadliest vegetable poison in the world,' said Nila.

So spring root was got ready and put into Koman's congee. As misfortune would have it, Koman was called away by a friend on urgent business just before the congee could be taken, and when he returned it was time for dinner. Nila said to Kokil, 'Poison is no good in his case. Somehow he always escapes. We must think of some other way of disposing of him.'

Days passed. Kokil began to receive presents of all kinds of modern trifles from a handsome vagabond called Madhav. Koman was wholly against Madhav's courting Kokil. 'Our Kokil ought to be married to a respectable man of substance, not to a worthless good-for-nothing fellow like Madhav,' he told Nila. 'See that Madhav never crosses our threshold again.' He also sent for Madhav and severely warned him. Madhav sneaked

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away, vowing secret vengeance. Kokil and Nila sympathized with him, Nila because of the coffee and cakes he used to bring, and Kokil because of his handsome features and presents of gaudy bodices and handkerchiefs. Koman forbade Kokil to wear these gaudy fabrics. 'Surely, uncle, even if you don't buy me these things you shouldn't object to my wearing what others give me,' said Kokil. 'Nonsense,' said Koman, 'let me see you wearing them and I will throw you and your mother outside the gate.' 'You are a heartless wretch,' said Kokil. 'So I shall appear now,' replied Koman. 'But time will sober your judgment. The man who courts the popularity of his children and sacrifices their good is the real heartless wretch.' So he increased his vigilance and succeeded in stopping the stealthy visits of Madhav and his stream of presents.



Nila, Kokil and Madhav were furious.

They plotted together how to dispose of Koman, and finally arrived at a plan of action. Madhav was to go over one night to Koman's house and cut his throat as he lay sleeping in the open verandah. They were to raise an alarm and pretend that the murder was committed by some unknown man whom they were to describe in detail, taking care that the description differed as much as possible from that of Madhav and, when the affair was forgotten, Madhav was to marry Kokil and all the three were to live happily on Koman's money, buying coffee and cakes and clothes and jewels to their hearts' content.

The night decided upon was very dark. Koman took his meal and went to sleep as usual in the verandah. At about eleven, he woke up with a piercing scream, exclaiming 'Murder! Murder!' Nila and Kokil rushed to

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him with a lamp and saw him writhing with pain and a pool of blood near him. They recognised that in the darkness Madhav had been unable to deal an effective finishing blow and had merely cut a portion of the neck. In her pretended perturbation, Nila let the light fall and be extinguished and ran into the house again on the pretext of relighting it. Going to the back-door, she saw Madhav with the reeking knife in his hand and said, 'Fool! go and strike again, and make no mistake this time. Strike till the head is severed from the body, and then run for your life.' Then, as she waited in the darkness, she heard renewed cries of 'Murder! Murder! Wretches, are you having me murdered?' and then an agonizing groan and the footsteps of one running away. 'He is dead at last,' said Nila to Kokil. 'Ah, it is a horrible thing to do a man to death,' replied Kokil,

'but perhaps in this case it was inevitable. Anyhow, I shall not marry the wretch who murdered him.' 'Why?' asked Nila. 'Oh, he will murder me with the same callousness, once we disagree. Besides he is a useless wretch and we shall not need his presents when we are rich ourselves.' 'True,' said Nila. 'Now let us see how the man is.' They relighted the lamp and went to where Koman was. His head had not been severed from the body as they had expected and hoped for. There were three terrific wounds on the back of the neck, and two dark streams of blood were visible. Koman looked at his sister and niece and, lifting himself up, said in feeble tones of poignant sorrow, 'Alas that you should have had this done!' and then again lay down exhausted. Two villagers attracted by Koman's cries came to the house. They had a light with them. Seeing Koman's precarious con-

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dition they were afraid lest they should get involved in a criminal case and so made a hurried exit

By the morning the news of the outrage had spread all through the neighbourhood. The police went and made a minute examination of the place. They found Koman unconscious and despatched him to hospital. Then, after secret enquiries and observation of the conduct of these women, their suspicions fell on Nila and Kokil and they promptly had them arrested and locked up. They went to Koman in hospital and asked him whether he suspected his sister and niece, adding that they had arrested and locked them up. Koman pretended dizziness and sleepiness. So they left him for an hour. That hour was one of intense struggle for Koman. He knew that the real instigators of the attempt were his sister and niece and

the hatred generated thereby prompted him to be avenged on them. But there arose in him also love for his own kith and kin. Denunciation of them would mean their utter ruin and the ruin of his family. Was it worth it? Had not the scriptures said that one should sacrifice himself for the sake of his family? He knew that they were heartless creatures, but then, they were his sole surviving relatives in the wide world. His heart went out in pity to the handsome girl and her mother shut up in a cheerless prison. He remembered the days when Nila and he played together affectionately as brother and sister and the later days when Kokil, a child of two, would go and comb his hair and give him a mock bath in childish innocence. The conflict of love and hate excited him so that when the doctor saw him half an hour after the police had left him, he was in a high

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fever. The worthy medical man attributed it to the wound, gave him a mixture and went his way. Half an hour more saw Koman's doubts disappear. Love had triumphed, and serenity came over his face. The fever was gone. The police officer came with a magistrate and wanted to take his dying declaration. In a low but firm voice he told the magistrate that he suspected nobody, that he had no enemies, that God alone knew who had attempted to murder him and that he could not identify the assailant or assailants. The police inspector gaped with astonishment. 'Don't you suspect your sister or niece?' he asked. 'Of course, not,' replied Koman. 'Would you suspect your sister or niece of such a heinous crime?' 'H'm!' said the police inspector, 'You are trying to shield them. They have all but confessed and said also that Madhav did the deed'. 'They may say any-

thing when they are locked up,' said Koman. 'Neither they nor Madhav had any motive to murder me, and I am certain that they are innocent of this deed.' The police inspector looked him straight in the eye and said 'Koman, you are about to die. In this solemn moment don't utter a lie. You know that Nila, Kokil and Madhav are at the bottom of this business?' 'If there is one thing I know, it is that neither of them has had the least connection with it. Now leave me,' said Koman. 'The man is lying,' said the police inspector to the magistrate. 'I am not concerned with that. I am here to record what he says,' replied the magistrate. 'An excellent case has been spoilt by this man's obduracy,' said the police officer. 'We can't help it. Now there is no use detaining the wretched women. I may as well release them.' Going to the women, he said, 'You are the worst wretches

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I have ever seen. The very man you wanted to murder refuses, however, to implicate you. I set you free. If you have any womanhood left in you, go and nurse Koman back to life.' Nila and Kokil burst into tears at the joyful news and went and sedulously attended on Koman. Such was the effect of their excellent nursing that, though the doctor had declared it a hopeless case, Koman was himself again in three months.

When he returned home from the hospital, Nila and Kokil fell at his feet and begged his pardon, promising never to behave again like that. 'You have atoned for your sin by your nursing me back to life,' said Koman. 'I forgive you readily. I recognize also that the fault was partly mine. I did not make allowances for difference in taste. Hereafter, coffee and fashionable clothes shall never be

wanting in the house. And, in return, promise never to allow Madhav to come in here again.' Nila and Kokil promised readily. From that day their whole behaviour changed. A more affectionate sister and niece were not to be found in the whole neighbourhood. Koman's life became happier than ever before and he even secretly sent for and gave a present to Madhav as the indirect and unwilling cause of this benevolent change, warning him, at the same time, to leave knives and people alone. One evening, Nila and Kokil confessed to him also about the chameleon incident and begged his forgiveness. 'I have forgiven it already,' said Koman, 'I heard about it from Madhav. Fortunately, the chameleon's saliva is only a mythical poison and so did not act on me. But let us forget all those evil days and look ahead.' The happiness in the home increased tenfold thereafter. In course

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of time Kokil was married to a respectable landlord of the locality, and Koman lived to fondle her first-born child. One day, when caressing it on his knee, he said to a friend, 'If I had allowed hate to triumph over love at that critical moment in the hospital, my family would have been entirely ruined instead of prospering as now. God made love triumph over hate and brought about all this happiness. After this, who can deny that Love is the most potent force in the universe and, in fact the supremest attribute of God?' 'No one,' replied the friend.

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## IN SEARCH OF A JOB

**D**EAREST, the wheel of fortune has turned in our favour at last, and Harihar has passed his B. A. in the first class. All our sufferings are now ended, ' said Sanjeeva to his wife Sarada.

' God be praised ! God be praised ! ' I always knew that He would favour us at last. How we despaired of getting any child for a great many years and then in my thirtieth year God gave us Harihar. His mercies may be slow in coming, but they do come if we wait long enough, ' replied Sarada.

' They have not come a moment too soon. All our resources are exhausted, even our power of borrowing, ' said Sanjeeva.

' Why rake up these sad thoughts at this time ? Let us rejoice. Let us have a small service in the temple in honour of this event.

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I am sure now that Padma's parents will seek eagerly for our boy's hand for Padma. We must demand at least two thousand five hundred rupees for our consent,' said his wife.

'Why hurry the marriage?' asked Sanjeeva, 'let the boy get a position. It will be time enough then to think of marriage.'

'In these hard days that will take a very long time. Nobody is waiting round the street corner with a position even for a first class graduate. If he marries now, the dowry I mentioned can easily be got, and our debts cleared and lands redeemed. If we wait as you propose, and show the world how difficult it is for even first class graduates to secure positions, desirable alliances will all disappear, and people may not offer even half the sum. The world will readily believe in a future but

will only too clearly understand the present. So let us not wait till the prestige of Harihar's high result dissolves in his failure to get employment,' said Sarada.

'Well, then, let us arrange his marriage,' said her husband.

Padma's parents came that very evening to congratulate Sanjeeva and Sarada, and brought Padma also with them. Padma was a charming girl and still at school. Sarada adroitly introduced the subject of Harihar's marriage by saying: that she hoped that her daughter-in-law would be as handsome and accomplished as Padma. 'We are all of the old and fast disappearing school,' she told Padma's mother. 'The rising generation will be educated, cultured, refined and independent. They will have no knee-joints, while ours are always bent in supplication.' Thereupon arose negotia-

tions for the marriage in right earnest. Padma was an interested spectator. She liked Harihar and did not mind marrying him. Marriage was to her inexperienced mind a long and unending game. Of the tragic side she knew nothing. At last, after dexterous manoeuvring on both sides, the marriage was settled and a dowry of two thousand five hundred rupees agreed upon. Harihar arrived at the end of the negotiations, and being told about the proposed marriage, thought within himself, 'This is the second great triumph within the last twenty-four hours. Only in this land of sages will university distinctions enable even paupers to marry beautiful girls from rich families and get handsome dowries. May the custom flourish ! ' and he gave Padma such a look of genuine love that she thought more than ever that marriage must be a jolly thing. Fifteen days later, Harihar and Padma were

united in the holy bonds of matrimony which of course, meant in this case only the sacramental marriage and not the actual nuptials.

Harihar's main preoccupation after the marriage was to scour the country in search of employment with cart-loads of letters of recommendation from accommodating professors, insincere relatives and uninfluential friends. In all government offices his applications were registered and he was apprised of the fact, but there the matter ended. Further communications elicited no reply, and visits to those offices profited none but the railway companies and eating houses. So, in despair and disgust, Harihar turned his attention to private concerns. Here he found that the employers, who were mostly illiterate fellows, had not even that mock respect for his first class B. A. degree shown by the highly educated bureau-

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crats in the government offices. These private employers seemed to be irritated by the mention of his educational qualifications. 'What do we care for graduates? I am not even a matriculate and yet I am prospering. I tell you, man, your degree is a disqualification instead of being a qualification. It may even irritate non-graduates,' said one employer to him, and he was correct. Harihar thought that the schools at least must respect his degree. So he offered himself to private school headmasters. Many of them rejected him altogether as being untrained. Only two entertained him. Of these one demanded that he should sign for forty rupees though he paid him only twenty five. He had also an inconvenient habit of dispensing with his teachers at the beginning of every vacation and re-engaging them at the re-opening of term by which device he saved the vacation pay. Furthermore, another

businesslike habit of his was to replace a teacher the moment one of equal qualifications offered himself at a smaller salary. Harihar had been scarcely a month in the school and was getting disgusted with the above practices when some other graduate offered himself for the post at twenty rupees instead of the forty-on-paper-twenty-five-real promised to Harihar, and so Harihar was asked to leave and was saved the trouble of protesting against the dishonest habits of the headmaster and tendering his resignation. 'After a year's search I got a position whose only joy is in quitting it,' said Harihar to himself ruefully. 'The world is a hard taskmaster and the problem of escaping from this life without compromising one's honour seems to be hard indeed. But I must persist, and success is sure to attend me at some stage, for there surely must be somewhere a Supreme Onlooker

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who will uphold the virtuous after testing them.' Consoling himself with this belief, poor Harihar pursued his quest for employment and discovered the other headmaster, who paid his teachers long after their pay was due and then too only by giving them the right to collect bad debts from students and tenants. 'At least, the other man paid something. This one only distributes paper sums,' thought Harihar. His belief in the moral order of the universe was fast disappearing. After serving his new headmaster for a year and recovering just sixty rupees by weeping to students and tenants to pay something in return for a full discharge of their debts, he thought of seeking some other employment. A briefless barrister friend advised him to study for the law, but Harihar had become wise enough not to be taken in by such foolish ideas and refused to

allow his parents to mortgage once again their lands to borrow money. 'At least, let those small bits remain for your maintenance,' he told his parents. 'We don't care, child, for ourselves,' said his mother, 'we can manage somehow. It is for you we are anxious.' 'I can take care of myself,' replied Harihar. 'Under no circumstances shall you sell or mortgage the lands for my sake.' 'So be it, son', said Sarada. 'You know that Padma has grown up and is now fifteen years old. We must have the nuptials performed soon.' Harihar was unwilling to have Padma live with him till he had got a good position and could maintain her, but his whole nature craved for a comforter in sorrow, a companion in solitude to whom he could unburden his soul. His parents were too old and distant for this purpose. The gap of years prevented free communication. What would

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be more ideal than to have his heart's beloved near him? So, while he pleaded for delay, it was a half-hearted plea, and his shrewd mother could see through it. The nuptials were arranged for the very next week.

The first thing that Harihar blurted out to his wife in the nuptial chamber was, 'Dearest, I am ashamed that I have not got a decent position yet, but my desire to have you near me was so great that I pocketed my shame and agreed to the early celebration of this ceremony.' Padma stopped him with a kiss, and would not allow him to resume the topic that night. For Harihar the night was one of supreme bliss, and the next morning he set out in search of work with redoubled hopes and enthusiasm. 'My honeymoon must be spent in this search,' he told Padma, 'I shall never feel worthy of you unless I can maintain you. So forgive me for wrenching

myself from you. Believe me, it is most painful to me. But duty, however painful, must be discharged.' Padma agreed.

The first man whom Harihar approached was an agent for Aramgarh locks who had advertised that he wanted a sub-agent at a salary of fifty rupees a month plus a liberal commission on sales. The only limitation to this generous offer was a cash security of two hundred rupees which too would bear interest at twelve per cent. Harihar had borrowed this money from his father-in-law. The Aramgarh locks, judging by all the advertisements, were a going concern, indeed very much so. Their kinds ranged from single levered locks to thirty-two levered ones and from single keys to eight keys. They were so skillfully made that not only thieves but even owners with the keys would find it difficult to open them. No

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wonder, the whole world was represented as lost in admiration at this new bulwark against thieves, and the unapproachable and irreproachable quarters thereof as sending unsolicited testimonials by cartloads. Harihar was assured by the agent that he could easily make a hundred a month by way of commission alone. It was therefore with real joy that he saw himself selected from among a score of applicants and his security accepted. On the very day of his appointment he was given a quantity of the famous locks and initiated into the mysteries of their wonderful mechanism. 'I say, don't you think it would have been better if the mechanism had been simpler?' asked Harihar of the agent. 'But would they be the famous Aramgarh locks, then?' asked the agent indignantly. 'When unsolicited testimonials are pouring in from unapproachable and irreproachable quar-

ters in cartloads, I am surprised that an agent of ours should depreciate our locks. Young man, what do you know of such matters?' 'Nothing,' replied Harihar humbly. 'Well,' said the agent, emboldened by this confession and desirous of pursuing his advantage, 'if you think so little of our locks you had better not be our agent.' 'Oh, no, it was a mere casual question,' said Harihar, 'I withdraw my remarks.' Then he asked the agent whether the company supplied coolies to carry the locks. 'You will have to engage them and pay them out of the fat commission of twenty-five per cent we allow you on the sales. You have got with you locks worth a hundred rupees. That means a net gain of twenty-five rupees. You are fortunate, young man,' said the agent, 'when I entered the bussiness I got only fifteen per cent commission and fifteen rupees pay.' Harihar put the locks on the

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head of a cooly and went from village to village exhibiting them. The villagers were quite willing to watch the tricks performed by the locks but when pressed to purchase they said that they had not sufficient intelligence to manipulate such locks and so could not buy them. Not a single lock was sold in a month of expensive peregrination through the villages. The cooly was to be paid half a rupee a day and meals, and then there were his own meals to be paid for. Harihar found at the end of the month that he had lost fifty rupees for nothing in addition to the waste of his time. At the end of the period he resolved to throw up the agency and look for something else. But when he went to the agent's office he found it shut. Neighbours told him that they didn't know where the man had gone but that he was badly wanted by a number of creditors and sub-agents. 'Have

you got any of his locks ? ' asked one merchant eagerly. ' Yes,' replied Harihar, and displayed the locks. Forthwith the other had them attached in satisfaction of a decree of his. Vainly Harihar urged that he had to recover two hundred rupees from the agent and was the person best entitled to the locks. He was told that the locks seized from him had been specifically pledged to the merchant concerned. In great indignation, in order to uphold his rights as a matter of principle, Harihar filed a suit in the local court for the recovery of the locks and engaged a lawyer who took five rupees as a first instalment of his fee and made him buy stamped paper for seven and a half more rupees. Harihar was inevitably detained for a week there and had to run up at intervals at great expense to attend the several hearings. He regretted his ardour for justice which was apparently not shared by

the law courts, but there was nothing else to do but go through the miserable trial at great expense. He produced the agent's receipt for the two hundred rupees and the court at once impounded it as it was unstamped and asked him to pay five rupees one anna, being the legitimate duty and penalty under the Stamp Act. Harihar indignantly refused to pay it, and so the civil court sent it to the Revenue officer who threatened to prosecute Harihar unless he paid the amount. Harihar stood the prosecution as a matter of principle and was duly convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of ten rupees or undergo simple imprisonment for a week by the compassionate magistrate. Harihar did not see that he should go to prison for the sake of principle and reluctantly paid the fine. Meanwhile the civil suit was decided against him, the court correctly holding that, the unstamped docu-

ment not having been adjudicated and admitted in evidence, the alleged security advance by Harihar was not proved and that, in any case, the locks having been specifically pledged to the decree holder, were rightly attached by him and should be restored to him and Harihar was ordered to pay twenty-five rupees as costs to the merchant. Poor Harihar paid up this amount as he saw no fun in defying the court and going to prison. 'The world is a madhouse where only knaves prosper,' he wrote to Padma, who consoled him by saying that he should not take such things to heart.

Then Harihar resumed his search for work, firmly resolving never to make any security deposit again and to give a good thrashing to the Aramgarh agent should he see him. As fate would have it, he found the agent's hiding place in two days. He caught hold of

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the agent and beat him till his hands were tired. The agent filed a complaint in a criminal court and, though Harihar put up the plea of provocation, the court would have none of it and sentenced him to pay a fine of fifty rupees or, in default, to undergo rigorous imprisonment for a month. To add to his fury, a sum of twenty-five rupees out of the fine, if recovered, was ordered to be paid to the agent as compensation. Harihar had, however, no particular desire to go to jail, especially as it would delight the heart of the agent. He thought to himself that he had got far better value for these fifty rupees than for the two hundred he had given as security. So he paid the fine and promptly had the twenty-five rupees payable to the agent attached as part payment of the security amount the receipt of which the agent had admitted. Harihar cheered himself with this solitary triumph and

pursued his search for work. He interviewed an editor who had advertised for a clerk. The editor appeared to be thoroughly pleased with him and forthwith appointed him to the vacancy. He told him that his salary would depend on his work, and Harihar determined to do his best and earn a record pay. He worked like a 'bull, for fourteen hours a day, and did all kinds of work. Indeed, it pleased him not a little to find that the editor allowed him to write editorials and do other important work within a very few days after engaging him. He flattered himself that he would be appointed as an assistant editor soon on a magnificent salary and felt relieved that at last he had found a job which suited him. A month passed, and the astonished Harihar was sent fifteen rupees and the acknowledgment book by his chief. He ran to the editor and asked him what he meant by

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offering him such a ridiculous salary. 'Merely business,' was the calm reply. 'Am I worth only that?' asked Harihar. 'Not very much more, I am afraid,' was the reply. Harihar abused the editor to his heart's content and threw up the position. Then he went as a clerk to a polytechnic Institute which taught bullock and buffalo cart driving, cocoanut and palmyra tree climbing, cow and goat milking, soda and lemonade making, and cooking, in addition to the usual type-writing, shorthand, book-keeping, correspondence and banking. He was given a salary of thirty rupees a month, but three days after he had taken up the position, he ridiculed the school and its courses of study to some teachers, who promptly reported the matter to the principal who dismissed him at once without paying him anything.

Tired of marching uselessly round the country, Harihar returned home. He related all his experiences to his wife that night and she had a hearty laugh. As it came from his beloved he did not take it amiss and indeed joined in it. When they had both again become serious, he said to her, 'And to add to my responsibilities is the fact that I am married. Early marriage has its disadvantages.' 'Has it any advantages?' asked Padma. 'Of course, it has,' said Harihar. 'For one thing it lessens sexual immorality.' 'Are all those married young free from blame, and are those married later full of vice?' asked Padma. 'Surely, you know your early married friends too well to be under any such illusion.' 'You may be right,' replied Harihar. 'After all as you say, morality may have little to do with early marriage. But you forget that all our actions are governed by Fate. Destiny

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made me marry you early.' 'Was it Destiny which made you marry me or was it penury?', asked Padma laughingly. 'Ah, you have stabbed me. Oh! Oh! Oh!', and Harihar, bowed down with sorrow, buried his face in his hands and sobbed like a child. Padma rushed to him, and, embracing and kissing him, said, 'Dearest, bear with me. If I stabbed you, I will heal you too.' 'I can bear with you. But can I bear with myself? What in all the world am I to do to save my self-respect?' said Harihar. 'Let us bury ourselves in the infinity of space and time,' replied Padma. 'No, no, seek not the desert sands of space or the cruel floods of time. Let us seek refuge in reality. Unreality ends with illusions while reality ends illusions,' said her husband. 'Let us then take poison and with one long rapturous kiss make our exit together from this land of unreality. On

some desolate sea-shore let us stand and say to the receding wave: 'Your life too is finished like ours. We are all slaves of unreality, mocked by reality. As you join the ocean, sick of your separate existence and unable to sustain it, so we too join the Eternal, sick of our separate existence and unable to sustain it. Song of the waves, song of the waves, lull us to sleep by your never ceasing music". So murmured Padma. Harihar was so deeply moved that for a minute he ecstatically embraced his wife and contemplated her proposition with approval. But, finally, he said, 'Dearest, you have justified my early marriage. Though born of mercenary considerations, it has been bred in the nobility of your bosom and has become ennobled. Such a noble woman as you should not die so early, above all for the sake of a creature like me. Suggest a less catastrophic remedy.' 'Cultivate your

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ancestral lands yourself in the most scientific fashion instead of leasing them out as now, and soon you will have found a job,' said Padma. 'Why did you not suggest that before?' asked Harihar. 'Because an educated man like you will never take to agriculture till he has tried his best to get other appointments and failed,' replied his wife. 'Will you help me in this?' asked Harihar. 'Of course, I will. What is more, if you agree, we will buy some waste lands and improve them too. My father has agreed to give a loan of one thousand rupees for this purpose.' 'Well, then, we will try this new job,' said Harihar. Sanjeeva was visibly depressed when he heard this resolution of his son. 'Then this B. A. degree of yours has been a sheer waste of money,' he said bitterly. 'No,' said Harihar, 'It has been of very great use. Without it I could not have got Padma, and, as you know, she is

my greatest asset.' Sanjeeva gaped. Sarada reconciled herself to her son's choice and tried to console her husband by saying, 'Both the darlings will be with us in our old age. That at least is a great blessing.'

Harihar and Padma pushed on their agricultural plans vigorously and in five years Harihar was earning more than fifteen hundred a year over and above all the expenses, besides the original income of the land. What is more, he was his own master, and had two healthy children. He said to Padma one day, 'How foolish I was to hunt so vainly for a position! Can you imagine a more criminal waste of time than that?' 'It was no waste of time,' said Padma. 'That search taught you valuable lessons and besides formed the adventurous side of your life. In fact, I am proud of them, and relate them to all my friends,' and she laughed. Just after this, the Vakil

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friend, who was as briefless as ever and often used to go to Harihar for a chat and to eat fruits, turned up, and, after consuming the greater part of a beautiful jack fruit, asked Harihar, 'Well, you and your wife seem to have thought a lot more about life and its problems than myself. What is your philosophy of life?' 'We are glad to live but shall not be sad to die. Birth is a mystery, death is a mystery, life is a mystery, but honest hands earnestly applied can ignore all these and live with reasonable joy,' said Harihar. Padma expressed her concurrence, and the Vakil friend too agreed with a vigorous nod as the last of the jack fruit went down his capacious throat.

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## HIS ANCESTRAL CURSE

**V**IJAYARANGA was the king of a small but prosperous kingdom in South India. His people were flourishing, his granaries full, and his treasury overflowing. He was only thirty and he had a beautiful queen and three bonny children, one a boy of twelve, another a girl of seven and the third a boy six months old. His devotion was real and his charities unbounded. No person in distress ever appealed to him in vain. He was the father of his people and was deeply beloved by them in return.

On his thirtieth birthday, the celebrations had been particularly splendid and spontaneous. His subjects had assembled in thousands and expressed their loyalty and love. Ambassadors of distant states had come to felicitate him in the name of their masters.

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Besides, Vijayaranga had made countless gifts to the learned and the poor and had derived the satisfaction which comes from such acts. Everything seemed to go well with him, and, as he retired indoors after the public functions were over, he could not help asking his mother, 'Can anybody be more favoured by God, mother, than we? Is not our happiness complete?' To his utter astonishment his erstwhile happy mother's face suddenly grew inexpressibly sad, and tears streamed into her eyes. 'Son,' she sobbed out rather than spoke, 'Don't you know the awful curse on our family?' 'Curse! what curse?' asked Vijayaranga in bewilderment. 'But, of course, you don't,' said his mother. 'Every king of the house of Ranga will die a violent death, every son of his will die before he is eighteen and every daughter will be widowed within a year after marriage. What more

'dreadful can happen to a family?' Vijaya-ranga reeled back like one stung by a cobra and sank on the sofa, extreme grief taking the place of his former cheerfulness. 'Surely mother, this cannot be true,' said he, 'for I am thirty now and have escaped the curse laid on the sons of the house of Ranga.' 'I pray that you may escape the curse,' said his mother, 'but I dare not hope for it. You have not escaped yet as you are not a son of a king of this house but are only an adopted child like your predecessor. The first part of the curse alone will apply to you. For two generations, my son, the curse has been literally fulfilled. Your two predecessors died violent deaths, and all their children suffered as predicted. I was widowed just a year after marrying your father who had such a sturdy constitution that nobody expected him to die so soon. For the sin of marrying me, a

daughter of Adiranga, he had to die. The day before his death he was as hale and hearty as ever. The next day he complained of fever and difficulty in breathing. Before the night was out he had been gathered to his fathers. A death so mysterious, sudden and terrible filled me with agony. I would have committed *Suttee* but for the fact that I had already concurred you and the priests forbade it on that account. After I was delivered of you, love for you kept me alive, but I shall certainly not survive your death. You are the exact likeness of your father, in facial features, sturdy physique and undaunted courage. But what will all these avail against the decrees of God?" and she hid her face in her hands and wept. "What is the cause of this dreadful curse, mother, and who is the person who cursed us?" asked Vijayaranga. "Your grandfather and my father, Adiranga, the founder of this

house, broke into a celebrated Siva temple with a band of irreligious soldiers and robbed the temple of all its jewels and precious stones worth a lakh of rupees. With the money thus robbed he enlisted more soldiers and conquered this land and established this dynasty. The priest of the temple, a young man of eighteen but extremely learned and noted for his austerities, laid this curse on our house,' replied his mother. Vijayaranga writhed with pain. 'So it is on this throne raised on sacrilegious plunder that I have been sitting so long, mother?' he asked. 'I must abdicate at once.' 'But there is no one to rule this land,' and it is the duty of a king not to leave his subjects unprotected,' said his mother. 'The wrong was committed long ago and cannot be set right in the way you propose without committing a greater wrong. Nothing can be done now except to pray to God to

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rid this house of the curse.' 'Where is this temple, mother, and is the priest still living?' asked Vijayaranga. 'It is in the midst of a dense forest thirty miles from the nearest habitation of man. None has gone there for the last fifty years, so dark and dreadful is the place. I am told that the priest is still alive and comes now and then to our country to watch the working of the curse and gloat over it.' 'I must go there and rid this house of this curse,' said Vijayaranga, 'Don't be so foolish,' said his mother. 'One must go alone, and one cannot sleep inside the temple because of the demons, and there is no other place to sleep in. Tigers and wild beasts roam all round, and your life will be like a hideous nightmare.' 'It is even more of a hideous nightmare now,' said Vijayaranga. 'I can't sit quiet, awaiting a violent death and the awful calamities to which my dear children

are destined. I shall have no peace of mind unless I get this curse withdrawn or fail in the attempt. So, pray, give me your blessing.

‘You have it, son,’ said his mother blessing him. At this point his wife Tirumalambal came in. Hearing of the dreadful curse and her husband’s dangerous decision she became very sad. ‘I don’t know which causes me more pain, the curse or his departure,’ she told her mother-in-law. ‘Why did you not tell us about the curse long ago?’ ‘It has been kept a close secret in the family and is not revealed to any but the eldest member, who with the family priest alone knows it. Today it escaped me in the stress of emotion,’ replied that lady. ‘Dearest, I implore you not to go,’ said Tirumalambal to Vijayaranga. ‘You will only meet a violent death earlier by going to this dreadful place.’ ‘Better meet a violent death half-way than allow it to

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overtake me when unprepared,' replied the king. 'I cannot endure the living torture of thinking of the curse and helplessly watching it taking its course any more than I can watch my army being massacred without making an effort to save it.' 'What can I do?' asked Tirumalambal helplessly of her mother-in-law. 'Remain here and look after the children till I return, and pray to God for my success,' said her husband.

Then Vijayaranga called his ministers and told them about his decision. They tried to dissuade him from the perilous enterprise, but in vain. 'Carry on the government during my absence,' he told them. 'If I return not, make my infant child Satyaranga king. He is twelve now. I hope to save him from the dreadful fate.'

After this Vijayaranga attired himself in an ordinary warrior's armour, took a tearful

farewell of his wife and mother and children and set out for the temple. After five days he reached the horrible forest full of thorny shrubs and wild beasts. Tigers, leopards, bears, hyaenas and other ferocious beasts were roaming about freely. Some of them attacked him as recklessly as moths approach a lamp. Vijayaranga with great effort killed many of those which attacked him, and the rest fled. He too sustained some minor injuries during the fight. Covered with blood, both of the animals and of himself, and weary, exhausted and thirsty, he finally reached the temple with its wall fifteen feet high of solid granite.

All was silence. The temple had a deserted appearance. The only gate had been closed with granite slabs. The whole scene was awe-inspiring, such as to make the soul sink. The place bore a strange resemblance to a scene of dreadful crime like murder.

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Who had shut the temple up? Was it Adiranga his ancestor, who robbed it of all its wealth and left it without even the resources for daily worship? The thought made Vijayaranga shudder. Had he feasted all these days on the proceeds of this ill-gotten wealth while this great temple lost its daily worship by his ancestor's misdeeds? Something, however, about the temple puzzled him. It was neat and orderly though it certainly looked abandoned. He climbed up a tree and had a look over the wall. Inside were two more walls equally high. The entrances through these walls had also been closed with granite slabs.

Finding no other way of effecting an entrance, Vijayaranga with great difficulty climbed over the walls and got into the court-yard of the inner temple. To his surprise he found water flowing from the stone pipe protruding from the central shrine. He

was sure now that worship was being performed and that the author of the curse was still alive. It cheered him that worship had been kept up in spite of his ancestor's great spoliation and that he could still restore this famous temple to its ancient grandeur. It was also an immense relief to him to learn that the author of the curse was alive as else his whole journey would have been fruitless since none could withdraw the curse except its author.

He was very thirsty and drank the water flowing out of the shrine and felt considerably refreshed. Then he had a look round and saw that the door of the inner temple was closed. He waited and waited, but there was no sign of its opening. So he knocked at the door and called out, 'Is any one here? For the sake of God open the door.' After he had

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repeated this at least a dozen times, an old man tottering with age opened the door and asked in amazement, 'Who are you and how did you manage to come here? You are covered with blood. Why did you come to this place so unclean and contrary to religious injunctions?' 'I saw no tank and dared not wash myself in the sacred water. I see no well either.' 'There is a well, but you cannot bathe in its water as it is used only for worship and the priest. Yonder hole leads to an underground tank full of crocodiles, snakes and leeches. If you dare, you can bathe in that.' 'There is nothing which Vijayaranga has not dared,' said Vijayaranga. 'Vijayaranga! Are you Vijayaranga the grandson of the miscreant Adiranga?' asked the old man in utter surprise and loathing. 'Oh, sinner, no water will wash thee clean except thy own blood.' 'In that case I can be washed clean,

‘for all over my body there is blood from the bites of wild beasts,’ said Vijayaranga. ‘Ha! That makes me wonder at your success in crossing this forest. Have you come here to steal again?’ asked the old man. ‘No, I have come here to do penance and induce you to withdraw your curse.’ ‘Your mission is in vain. Get away!’ said the old man, his face black with rage, and rushed into the shrine and shut the door.

Vijayaranga went to the tank indicated by the old man. The hole leading to it was dark and the steps were broken. The tank itself was overgrown with mosses and lilies and was full of life. From its look it was clear that none had bathed in it for years. With prayers to God Vijayaranga plunged into the water. Two crocodiles attacked him but he escaped them though not without being wounded by them. Leeches, however,

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being smaller could not be so easily shaken off and sucked some of his blood. He was fainting with hunger. Tired to death, he went again to the inner temple. 'So you have succeeded in bathing there,' said the old man, with hatred in his eyes. 'What if you had died?' 'I would have then completely atoned for my ancestor's sin and died in a holy place,' replied Vijayaranga. In spite of himself, the priest looked with admiration on this man who feared not death. 'Has death no terrors for you?' he asked. 'Your curse has made life so miserable that death were preferable,' replied the King. 'How will you atone for your ancestor's sin,' asked the old man. 'In any way you order,' replied Vijayaranga. 'I will, if you want it, return the stolen money with interest.' 'Out of the money made with the stolen money,' said the old man ironically. The king hung

down his head with shame, for the old man had spoken the bare truth. 'I will work in this temple till death,' said he. 'Your services will not be worth the food which you consume,' said the other. 'And however clever you are as a worker, a temple servant can never honestly earn more than a hundred rupees a year. Then in the remaining twenty or so years of your life how do you hope to pay off the one hundred thousand rupees Adiranga stole?' 'I must pray to God to release my undischarged debt after giving up all the money I have got now. He will do so for His faithful servant.' 'Will He? Let us see,' said the old man mockingly. 'I rely on God's infinite mercy alone. He is my only refuge and defence. Oh, He will surely forgive me,' said Vijayaranga. 'No, not so long as I am His priest,' said the old man. 'Why, what spite have you against me? Can you say

that my life has been sinful? Have I consciously done one injustice?' asked the king. 'So far as I have heard you are the justest and most virtuous king of our times,' said the priest. 'Then, why do you stand in my way?' asked Vijayaranga. 'You must suffer for your ancestor's sin,' replied the priest. 'Are not the sufferings of my two predecessors and their children enough?' asked the King. 'Should the innocent too suffer for the faults of their ancestors?' 'Yes, because they profit by the misdeed.' 'But I offer to give up my kingdom and my riches. Now at least will you withdraw your curse?' 'No, for you will be a fitting example for the world. In spite of your goodness you will suffer for your ancestor's sin, and humanity will take a lesson.' 'Am I to be sacrificed for the sake of giving this lesson to humanity?' 'Yes, the sacrifice of a man is nothing when the general welfare

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requires it; you as a king must know that.' 'Yes,' said Vijayaranga, 'but will not the fact that goodness and repentance count for nothing in the eyes of God as against an ancestor's sin discourage humanity and deter it from a life of virtue? Will not, for instance the descendants of a sinner be tempted rather to lead lives of sin since in any case they will be punished and a good life will avail them nothing?' 'Leave all these considerations to God. If you like, you can take to a life of sin hereafter as it now appears that you were leading a life of virtue simply for the sake of reward and not out of the conviction that a virtuous life is worth living for its own sake.' 'Is there then no hope for me?' asked Vijayaranga in an agonized voice. 'None. Get away from this place and meet the violent death to which you are destined,' said the priest. 'I will gladly

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meet the violent death, provided the curse ends with me. Save, oh save my children and descendants,' said Vijayaranga, falling at the old man's feet. The old man shook him off and said, 'The law of *Karma* must be fulfilled. None can alter it.' 'The Lord of *Karma* can,' said Vijayaranga. 'He won't alter it. Get away!' said the priest. 'I will not. I will starve myself to death here,' said Vijayaranga. 'No, you are destined to die a violent death,' said the old man. 'Then kill me before Him whose property my ancestor stole,' and Vijayaranga handed his sword to the old man. 'Why should I sin to oblige you?' said the old man. 'Do as you like.'

Vijayaranga stayed in the temple, bathed every day in the horrible tank and sitting in the porch of the inner temple, fasted and prayed, prayed and fasted. Daily he grew

weaker, but the old man, though he went about here and there and conducted the worship regularly, did not take much notice of him. With a stony glare he watched him, and on the third day, seeing Vijayaranga's extreme weakness, said mockingly, 'It is not so easy for a king to starve. Your pampered body, fed on the proceeds of robbery, will soon prevail over your foolish resolve.' 'Not while I have consciousness,' said Vijayaranga. Late in the evening of the fourth day, he became unconscious and fell down. The priest saw this unmoved and went to sleep in a corner of the temple. In the distant palace Tirumalambal's right eye quivered and she said to her mother-in-law, 'Great danger has befallen my dear husband. Let us all pray for him.' All night the two ladies and the little children and the whole household prayed with afflicted

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hearts to Him who alone can succour the helpless.

The priest had hardly slept five minutes when, in a dream, God said to him, 'Oh, stony-hearted man, Vijayaranga's atonement is more acceptable to me than your vengeful devotion. Withdraw the curse and restore his senses with holy water and rice. Otherwise begone from this place.' The old man shuddered and asked, 'Is my life's mission to be undone?' 'Your mission is fulfilled. The sin has been amply atoned for. Wake him up and do as I command,' was the reply. 'Thy will be done!' said the old man, and there the dream ended and he awoke. Tirumalambal, kneeling before the family idol with tearful prayers, felt her left eye quiver. 'Our prayers have been answered. My husband has passed through the danger. Praise be to God!' she said to her mother-in-law, and all of them

continued their prayers with even greater fervour.

Meanwhile, the old man went to Vijayaranga and revived him by throwing cold water over him and giving him some holy water to drink. 'Ah,' said Vijayaranga opening his eyes. 'Where am I? Oh, in this temple of penance! Why, oh cruel man, do you revive me when you will not withdraw your curse? Such revenge is inhuman. Let me die in peace.' 'The curse is withdrawn,' said the old man savagely. 'What!' said Vijayaranga falling at his feet, 'Oh, reverend father, do I hear aright?' 'You do,' said the old man. 'But thank not me. Render your prayers to Him who preferred your four days' fasting to my life-long devotion and ordered me to release you from the curse despite my protest.' Vijayaranga stood up and prayed. 'Lord of the

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'Universe, Your mercy is infinite. Without that we frail human beings cannot stand before Your dread justice.' Then he promised the old man to restore the temple to its former glory and implored him to continue as the priest. 'No priesthood for me,' said the old man, 'My life's purpose has been foiled. There is no use in my living any longer, Kill me, then and fulfill your mission,' said Vijayaranga. 'No, No. He will protect you well enough Pray to Him once again,' replied the priest. Vijayaranga prayed fervently once more. When he had finished, the old man was not to be seen. He searched everywhere but in vain. At last he went to the tank and saw the crocodiles finishing their gruesome feast. On the stone steps in white mud were written the following words:~ 'Vijayaranga, favoured of God, I die a prey to these crocodiles which I reared. I cannot live a new life

or learn the new lesson that forgiveness is greater than revenge. Think of me what you will, but I was as great a devotee as you. The destined violent death has been transferred to me by the will of the Lord of Destiny. The curse on those who do not enter the forest alone is withdrawn. But this temple will not survive me, its spirit. Peace be to all the worlds, for in death I can wish nothing less. Vijayaranga wept hot tears of pity for the blasted life of the poor old man, cruel but pathetic as he was. Tears of joy took their place when Tirumalambal clasped him to her bosom and his youngest child struggled in his arms. •

A month later, Vijayaranga with his priests and ministers went to the forest in order to restore the service in the temple, but found that the whole building had collapsed and the

idol had fallen to bits as a result of an earthquake. 'We can soon rebuild it,' said a minister. 'Leave it as it is,' said Vijayaranga. 'The old man was right. The temple did not survive its spirit. We can build a new one in our capital. Let this remain as a tomb of the steadfast though deluded devotee.'

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## RECOVERED BLISS

**A**KKU was a handsome young woman. She was happily married. Her husband was very affectionate and was also a man of considerable property. So she lacked neither love nor comforts. Her simple soul felt contented. She had had but one sorrow in her life and that was the death of her first-born some six months back. He had been a lovely boy. A red spot had appeared on its tender limbs on the fifth day after delivery. Chachi, the barber midwife who had attended at the birth, had declared at once that the child was sure to die, and her prophecy had been fulfilled in two days. From that time Akku hated Chachi like poison, and, owing to her backbiting, many people ceased to call Chachi to their houses and Chachi's heart was sore at the loss she sustained thereby. The midwife hated Akku secretly with an intense and venom-

ous hatred though she did not dare to show it outwardly owing to the wealth and influence of Akku's husband Sastha. But in her heart she vowed vengeance on Akku whenever a suitable opportunity occurred. Meanwhile, she pretended that she bore her no ill-will and even publicly asked her pardon for having made the ill-omened prophecy. Unsuspecting Akku readily pardoned her. Except this malevolent creature Akku had no enemies. Her nature was loving and simple. There was nobody so obliging to neighbours or so ready to render aid to the poor and the deserving.

Sastha was even more simple and unsuspecting than his wife. Being rich, he did no other work than collect his rents. To while away time he used to play chess for hours together with a bosom friend called Neelakantan. This man was a bachelor and had a reputation for religiousness. He had ancestral

property enough to maintain himself comfortably all through life, and spent most of his waking hours either in wandering about the countryside or in playing chess or in prayers. 'A man must have plenty of physical, mental and moral exercise if he is to keep sound health,' he used to say to his friends. 'My wandering is my physical exercise, my chess my mental, and my prayers my moral exercise. That accounts for my perfect health.' It was no idle boast. Neelakantan's physique was the best in the whole village and for miles around. The local doctor, Subrahmanyam had often commented on this fact, adding that it was a pity that Neelakantan did not marry and transmit his health to future generations. In fact, the doctor used to call Neelakantan the 'Eugenics Man,' much to the delight of that worthy.

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Neelakantan was a constant visitor at Sastha's house and would often stay for meals or tiffin. Sastha was very intimate with him. And even Akku freely conversed with him as with one of her own household. Many a time Neelakantan would go to Sastha's house even when he was absent and wait for him, beguiling the interval by talking to Akku. From the very first day he saw Akku, a guilty passion had arisen in his heart, and closer association with her had only deepened it. He decided to proceed cautiously lest he should meet with failure. So for months he hid his passion and never gave the least cause to any body to suspect that there was any erotic element in his relations towards Akku. That lady gradually became as free with him as with a brother and played and joked with him with perfect abandonment. Then, one day, when Sastha was away collecting rents and they had had a

game of chess together, Neelakantan held Akku's arm for a second and pressed it a little. Akku flushed and withdrew her arm quickly with a look of anger in her face. Neelakantan realizing his mistake, at once broke into a laugh and said, 'Poor Akku, how easily you are fatigued! A single game of chess has made your pulse beat faster and your face flush.' Akku was bewildered by the sudden change in the man. He was now as calm and innocent-looking as ever. Had she made a mistake? Was he, after all, only feeling her pulse? 'There is no sign of your husband yet. Shall we have another game, or do you feel too tired for it?' asked Neelakantan. 'I am too tired,' replied Akku. 'Besides, I feel sleepy.' 'All right. I will wait in the verandah. You had better have a nap. You look as if you required it badly,' said he and forthwith went to the verandah and waited

there. Akku shut the door but did not go to sleep. She wondered whether Neelakantan had in reality only intended to feel her pulse or whether he had meant to make improper overtures. His strange conduct was susceptible of both interpretations, but Akku felt that the probability was more on the side of his guilt though it was difficult to give satisfactory reasons for her belief.

An hour later Sastha came and asked Neelakantan why he was sitting outside. 'Akku's pulse was rather irregular and her face flushed, so she took a small nap while I made myself comfortable in the verandah,' said Neelakantan. 'Oh, you are not a stranger; you could have waited inside the house,' said Sastha. By this time Akku had opened the door. 'How do you feel now?' asked Neelakantan. 'I am very much better, thank you,' said Akku. Then Sastha took his meals

along with Neelakantan, who talked and laughed as freely and naturally as on previous days. After the meal was over, Neelakantan and Sastha had a game of chess. Then Neelakantan left for his walk.

‘Why do you associate with Neelakantan so much?’ asked Akku of her husband as soon as his friend had gone. ‘He is my alter ego. I cannot do without him. He came into my life earlier than you and is as dear to me,’ replied Sastha. ‘Is he of good character?’ asked Akku. ‘Of course; why do you ask?’ asked her husband. ‘His behaviour towards me today was very peculiar and rather suspicious,’ she said, and related the whole incident. ‘You are certainly wrong in your suspicions,’ said Sastha. ‘Neelakantan is morally sound, very sound. He is also extremely religious. It is absurd to think that a man like that would try to misbehave in a house

like this with a woman whom he knows to be spotlessly pure. It is inconceivable that he would not have become confused as soon as you angrily withdrew your hand. Had his intentions been guilty. Again, if he were really guilty would he not have spoken an amorous word or even cast an amorous glance and yet you are positive that he did neither of these. Then too, had he the intention you suppose, would he have waited for me and spoken about your sickness to me and even to you? You have never found anything suspicious in him before. I am absolutely certain that you have mistaken a friendly and innocent gesture for a dishonourable move. Think no more about it and behave towards him the same as before.'

Neelakantan had been deeply offended at the contemptuous and angry way in which Akku had withdrawn her hand. She had

recoiled from his touch as one would from filth. This wounded his vanity which was with him his self-respect. Was he, the 'Eugenics Man', to be so slighted? He resolved to have his revenge on this woman, apparently so simple but really as shrewd as himself. 'Her quick suspicion of my intentions, her pretended sleep, all these are clear evidences of her cunning. One must proceed very cautiously with her if he is to land her in trouble. I am determined to have her by hook or by crook. Thank God, her husband is an ass,' said he to himself. 'For some months more I must behave the same as before as if nothing has happened'. So daily he went to Sastha's house as of old, and found absolutely no difference in Sastha. Akku too was unchanged when her husband was present, but when he was absent she had an indefinable appearance of being on her defen-

sive though she never showed her suspicions outwardly. Whenever he suggested a game of chess she would say, 'You know how a single game upsets me. I would rather not play.' Her talk too would be formal. The old freedom had disappeared, and a polite reserve had taken its place. So Neelakantan would wait in rather an unwanted fashion till Sastha came. As soon as the latter was sighted, however, Akku would assume her former free demeanour. Sometimes when he suddenly entered, Akku would look embarrassed at the thought of the strange treatment she was meting out to Neelakantan despite her husband's orders. Once or twice Sastha asked her and Neelakantan why they were sitting glum instead of having a game of chess, and both said that Akku was feeling rather unwell. After the meal was over, however, Akku would have a game of chess with her husband if

Neelakantan were absent, and this never upset her health. A month after her complaint about his friend, Sastha asked her, 'Well, have your suspicions about Neelakantan disappeared?' 'Yes', she replied, laughing. 'I confess I was mistaken.' 'I told you so,' he said. Akku had found his later conduct exemplary, but still thought that it would be better to keep to her present attitude of discreet reserve when her husband was absent. This, however, she did on principle and not because of any suspicion of Neelakantan whom she now believed to be thoroughly innocent and unjustly suspected by her.

Meanwhile, Neelakantan was plotting against the pure-hearted Akku. He went to Chachi and, giving her ten rupees, asked her to give him information about the secret marks or moles on Akku's body which she had

discovered at the time when she attended on her. He knew that she was nursing a venomous enmity towards Akku and would be sure to help. Chachi was only too ready to oblige. She told him that Akku had a blue mole on her left hip and a black wart on the inner side of her right thigh. 'Now is sweet revenge ~~near at hand,~~' said Neelakantan to himself triumphantly as he left her house, after pledging her to secrecy

The next day he did not go to Sastha's but stayed in his own house, engaged in loud prayers. As he had expected, Sastha soon called and asked him why he had not gone to his house as usual. 'Lord, lead me not into temptation and sin,' ran out Neelakantan's fervent prayer. 'I say, stop all this nonsense,' said Sastha. 'What has coming to my house to do with temptation or sin?' 'Save me from cheating the innocent and the trusting,'

continued Neelakantan. 'This is not time for your usual prayers. Leave this and come with me at once to my house,' said Sastha. 'It is impossible,' said his friend. 'Impossible! Why?' asked Sastha. 'Oh, Sastha, what a wretch I am!' said the other in a contrite tone full of self-condemnation and choked with irrepressible tears. 'Don't speak to me ever again. I really did love you sincerely and I hope that even now I do. Else, this effort would have been too much for me. But the devil in me proved too strong for me and I succumbed.' 'What is all this?' said Sastha bewildered. 'How did you fall? What did you do?' 'I—I—well, I have misbehaved with your wife,' blurted out Neelakantan almost collapsing, 'Forgive me, for I was led away by my passion. Forgive her too for she succumbed to her longing for a child.' Sastha was dumb with astonishment and grief for some time and then said, 'Are

you speaking the truth? It is difficult to believe what you say. Why, she was complaining to me about you some time ago and I said that she must be mistaken. After that she has told me nothing.' 'You smothered the still small voice of her conscience,' said Neelakantan. 'She told me that you regarded such things as trifling and that she felt relieved thereby. After that day we stopped playing chess during your absence and spent the time in the pursuit of this illicit love. When we knew you were coming we behaved normally. But when you came suddenly Akku used to look rather embarrassed. I wonder whether you noticed that.' 'I did,' said Sastha, 'but I never suspected this. Well, even now I can't believe this strange story without further evidence.' 'I have done my duty. If you prefer to ignore or disbelieve the incident I shall only be too

glad,' said Neelakantan and made signs as if to go in. 'Damn it, man, have you any proofs?' asked Sastha savagely. 'In matters like this what proof can there be stronger than the confession of one of the parties, when the confession is against his interest, and such circumstantial evidence as I have indicated?' said Neelakantan. 'But, if it is any good to you, I may add that I saw a blue mole on her left hip and a black wart on the inner side of her right thigh.' Sastha stepped back like one stabbed. 'Good God,' said he, 'how deceptive women are!' 'And men', added Neelakantan tearfully, 'only, woman is the temptress.' Sastha said nothing. He buried his head in his hands and sobbed like a child. 'My Akku to have done this!' moaned he. 'Pray, forgive her,' said Neelakantan. 'Silence, you wretch, you wrecker of my domestic happiness,' said Sastha. 'Never shall a

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harlot live in my house. 'I will drive her away this moment,' and rushed to his house. 'The ruse has succeeded,' said Neelakantian to himself, as he resumed his prayers. 'Thus are fools caught in wise men's nets. The woman has no relations and no means and knows no trade. So, perforce, when cast off by Sastha, she will be mine for the asking.'

Sastha went home in a rage, called out Akku and said: 'Wretch, leave this roof at once!' Akku was bewildered and asked, 'Why, what I have done?' 'You are a harlot though you cunningly conceal it,' said Sastha. 'Oh that you should have deceived me thus!' 'What!' said Akku and stood rooted to the spot. Sastha was deaf to the ring of genuine indignation in her tone and mistook her bewilderment for confusion at her guilt having been discovered. 'Yes, every-

thing is out. Neelkantan has confessed,' said he. 'Neelakantan! What has he confessed?' asked Akku. 'That he misbehaved with you and you with him,' said Sastha, his voice rising to a shout. 'The wretch told you that?' asked Akku. 'Don't you see it is all the villainy of this man who wanted to entrap me and failed? Don't you remember my complaining to you before?' 'It is all make-believe, part of your conspiracy. Neelakantan has told me about the blue mole on your left hip and the black wart on the inner side of your right thigh. How the devil could he know that unless you misbehaved with him?' 'I am the victim of, a devilish conspiracy,' said Akku, 'and you are the tool to deal me the blow. I can't say how the man knew about the mole and the wart, but, believe me, I am innocent.' 'I can't believe you. All women are liars,' said Sastha.

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‘Then I am not one,’ said Akku indignantly. ‘Hold your tongue and pack off,’ said her husband. ‘Where am I to go to? You are my father and mother. I shall remain here as your maid-servant, your slave. Feed me as you would your dog till the truth is out and you see your error.’ ‘No, I can’t allow you to do that. There is no food for a harlot here.’ ‘Oh, that I should hear this foul name hurled at me!’ said Akku. ‘Rather than hear that I would prefer to starve on some bare rock or kindly *pial* or temple porch.’ Then she left the house saying, ‘Till today I was sorry that I had no child. Now I am glad that there is none, as another life is saved from being blasted. Soon you will realise your error and pine for me. I shall, if I survive, be ready to come again, for I know that you are good at heart but only misled, deceived.’

'I wonder if she is really guilty,' said Sastha to himself. 'The dignity with which she went out was worthy of a Sita. But she was unable to explain how Neelakantan knew about the mole and wart. It was an evil day when this Neelakantan entered my life. Would to God I had cast off the fellow on the day when she complained about him. These men who wreck homes are even more guilty than the unfortunate women who succumb. But there is no question of calling the harlot back. The real point is, did she misbehave?' This worried him so much that he sat on the floor of the central hall plunged in meditation and weary with thought.

Akku went to several ladies she knew and offered to work in their houses if only they would give her food and shelter. Meanwhile, the whole village had come to know about her supposed adultery with Neelakantan,

and her expulsion by her husband. Most people believed the scandal, and the few who did not believe it had not the courage to say so openly. The consequence was that nobody was willing to take in Akku, either because of her alleged bad character or because they did not want a servant and did not want to feed her free, or because she was no good as a servant or owing to the fear of her husband's wrath if they did so. So Akku left the village and walked along the lonely country road leading to the river which was in flood, her heart filled with black despair. When she reached a particularly lonely region near the river and three miles away from the village she was suddenly waylaid by Neelakantan. 'You are unjustly cast off by your husband, all because you spurned my offers. Now, at least, get a little happiness out of life and agree to my proposals. I will give you a

handsome house and ample food to eat, in a place far away from here. Nobody will know,' said he and advanced towards her. 'You wretch!' said Akku, and ran back to escape from him. He pursued her, shouting out, 'Now you are within my power and cannot escape.' Akku picked up a stone the size of a mango and hurled it at his head when he was about three yards away. It struck his left eye and blinded it. He sat on the ground nursing his eye. 'For the sake of a wretched woman I have lost my eye,' he cried out. 'Let the lost eye be a warning to you not to wreck the lives of poor women like me by foul slanders,' said Akku. 'I shall file a complaint and see you sent to jail,' said Neelakantan. 'I shall say that out of spite at being turned out by your husband you hurled the stone at me and put out my eye without any provocation and simply because my adultery with you and

subsequent confession were the causes of your expulsion. I shall say nothing of the present incident, nor indeed the falsity of my previous slander. And there will be no witness to speak to the truth.' 'God is my witness,' said Akku. 'Yes, but He will not depose in courts, nor has He any representative here who will do so,' said Neelakantan. 'He has, He has,' said a voice suddenly, and the jovial form of the local doctor appeared. 'Hypocritical villain!' said he to Neelakantan, 'Don't think that villainies will always escape undetected. God save us from such praying hypocrites, eugenics men, and bachelors!' Neelakantan stood petrified with shame and fear. After the first tremors of these emotions were over, he moaned, 'Doctor, my eye is bleeding and aching.' 'I shall not attend to it unless you make a full confession to Sastha,' said Subrahmanyam. 'I swear to do so,' said

Neelakantan. Then the doctor bandaged his eye. After this he said to Akku, 'Come, poor Akku, let us go to your husband and relate the whole incident to him. Where had you intended to go, had you not been stopped by this rascal?' 'To the river in order to fall into it and commit suicide,' said she. 'Nobody would take me in or feed me. I had nowhere to go to except Nature's wide and friendly bosom.' 'Poor child,' said the doctor, 'helpless by nature, unaided by education, uncared for by society, your only resource when deserted by your husband and relations is suicide like that of so many other of India's daughters. When I think of all this I feel tempted rather to put out this villain's other eye than attend to his wounded one.' 'Doctor, I crave your mercy,' said Neelakantan. 'I hope you won't get any mercy in Heaven,

that you will be doomed to eternal damnation,' said the doctor with warmth.

They reached Sastha's house at night-fall, and found Sastha in the hall, resting his chin on his right palm, a picture of meditation, melancholy and misery. At the sight of the three he asked Akku, 'Why have you come back, you harlot?' 'Most abandoned of men,' said the doctor, 'don't pollute the air by calling this virtuous lady such foul names. Slave of slander, when will you learn to distinguish a real precious stone when you get it?' and he related the whole story. Neelakantan corroborated it, expressed his repentance, and begged Sastha's forgiveness. 'How did you know about the mole and the wart?' asked Sastha. 'I learnt about them from Chachi for ten rupees,' replied Neelakantan. With a spring Sastha fell on him, tore off his bandage and dealt him a heavy

fistcuff on the wounded eye before the doctor could wrench the panic-stricken Neelakantan from his grasp and take him away. Then Sastha fell at Akku's feet and said, 'Akku, my Akku, forgive me. I am a heartless villain and have done you a grievous injustice.' 'Now, let us embrace,' said Akku, raising her husband and embracing him. 'The moment of recovered bliss is not one for moody thoughts or unwanted tears. Both of us were victims of villainy, you just as much as I.' 'You are very generous,' said Sastha. 'I wish the fellow had lost both his eyes.' 'The loss of one eye will be sufficiently deterrent,' said Akku. 'But, dearest, a more important thing is for husbands not to believe such slanders about their virtuous wives so readily and to turn them out of doors to death or worse.' 'The mole and the wart did it,' said Sastha. 'A hundred thousand moles and warts should

not have done it,' said Akku. 'I agree,' said Sastha. 'I acted hastily and heartlessly, I don't know what can equal the height of my cruelty!' 'The depth of my love,' said Akku, clasping him to her bosom.

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## THE SCIENCE OF SUCCESS

**D**INNER was just over, and the guests were chewing their betel and discussing success. 'Success comes by mere luck and is pure accidental,' said one. 'Often, the most gifted men fail while idiots succeed. You can't explain it or diagnose it. It is just luck, nothing else.' 'I hold that success is determined by circumstances, by what you care to succeed in,' said a second. 'A man whose ambition is only to save a rupee or kill an ant or tell a lie will easily succeed. One who wants to fly to the moon or kill egoism or never tell a lie may never succeed.' 'Well, I am disposed to think that success is to be found in some quality inherited at birth ; in other words that heredity has got a deal to do with it,' said a third. 'There is what one might call a Science of Success,' said a fourth.

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‘Success is a science, is a fruit of failures provided that you can deduce useful lessons from them and profit by them. The story of Malai is ample proof of my statement.’

‘What’s that story?’ said the other three.

‘Well,’ said the gentleman in question, ‘Malai at the age of eighteen was a poor youth with absolutely nothing to call his own, neither lands nor wife nor children nor relations, when his father died. His mother had died long before that. The youth was lazy by temperament and disliked hard manual labour though he was physically strong and able to endure strain and fatigue. So he took to crime.’

‘He was a novice in crime, and his was that kind of portable-typewriter brain not fitted for heavy or difficult work but serviceable enough for light. His first debut was rather absurd. From his house facing the road he

saw a man carrying a suit-case. At once he swooped on him, robbed him of the suit-case though several persons were present just a few yards before and behind, and rushed back into his house with the loot. Needless to say, a crowd entered his house, restored the suit-case to the passenger, and gave Malai a sound drubbing. He learnt from this bitter experience the lesson "Don't be dishonest in front of your house and in the presence of witnesses."

'So next time he went five miles away from his house and committed a robbery on a man walking along a lonely road. The man put up a sturdy fight and, though defeated in the end, gave such an accurate description of the robber to the police that Malai was easily caught and punished. The lesson he learnt was "Theft is safer than robbery."

' After return from jail, he saw a man put his bundle on a wayside rest and go to an adjacent tank to wash himself. He grabbed the bundle and ran away, but the owner came soon after and gave chase and caught him. He was again put in jail. "A thief should have a reasonable certainty of getting time to escape before he steals," was the truth he garnered.

' Next time he found a man sleeping with his bag near him. He took it and was about to run away when the sleeper awoke and he was caught and in due course punished. "A thief should not count on uncertain factors like sleep," was the lesson he learnt.

' After this term was over, he found a cow straying and killed it and sold its flesh. He kept its hide for drying and sale. The owner of the cow complained to the police, and they suspected Malai, he being an ex-convict,

searched his house, and recovered the hide which was identified as that of the dead cow by its owner. Malai was again sent to jail. This episode taught him that it was dangerous for a thief to keep identifiable goods with him.

‘Malai tired of thefts and tried his hand at burglaries. He went to a village ten miles away and at night bored a hole in the wall close to the door of a house occupied at the time by a solitary woman. He then put his arm into the hole and tried to undo the bolt of the door trusting in the helplessness of the woman and her inability to offer any resistance. She, however, took a bill-hook and struck a heavy blow on his fore-arm which had been thrust inside. Leaving an ounce of blood behind, he hurriedly withdrew his arm with a shrill yell of pain and scampered back home.

‘Never despise your opponents, however

weak, and don't put yourself in their grasp,' was the home-truth he learnt now.

' His arm ached so much that Malai went for treatment to the neighbouring hospital and was entertained as an in-patient. His abortive burglary had caused much sensation in the neighbourhood, and the doctor in charge of the hospital was so struck with the peculiar nature of his wound that he sent word to the police who arrested him, had him tried for attempted burglary and locked up in jail once more. Malai learnt thereby that the criminal must deny himself medical aid for wounds got in committing crimes if he is to escape arrest.

' His next attempt was on the property of a temple whose idol was supposed to have much power. Malai was not an idolator and he scoffed at the alleged might of the idol. Its gold and silver ornaments were also a great temptation. 'What can a stone image do?'

said he to himself. One night he broke into the temple through the roof, removed the ornaments, and was about to clear off when he was gripped from behind. Turning round he saw the temple priest. He struggled hard, bit the priest, was bitten in return, and delivered and received stunning blows, the net result of all this being the assembling of a crowd and his own arrest and subsequent imprisonment. "Even if God is not powerful, His priest may be" was the lesson he got.

'By this time he felt that it was safer to use more guile. So he aided a junior member in stealing a lot of property from his family, the stipulation being that he was to receive one-fourth. But the elders of the family got scent of the transaction and soon persuaded the junior member by kind words and gifts to reveal all the details. Malai got only a severe beating for his pains. "Never rely on an

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accomplice unless he is equally involved in the crime " was the truth he learnt.

' His next adventure was in cheating by jugglery. Disguised as a *Sanyasi* he told a gullible farmer that he could make earth into gold if only he performed certain costly ceremonies, and persuaded the dupe to give him a hundred rupees for the purpose. He told the farmer that he would have to retire into a cave and perform the ceremonies unseen by anybody. He had carefully chosen a cave with two egresses in opposite directions so that while the farmer was awaiting him at one opening he might abscond by the other. A day was fixed a week ahead for the payment of the money and the performance of the ceremonies, and the farmer was sworn to secrecy. The farmer, however, could not keep his mouth shut and gossiped about the alchemist and his having been commissioned by him to

make earth into gold. The news reached the police who suspected fraud and laid a trap. The consequence of all this was that on the momentous day when Malai emerged out of the second egress with the hundred rupees he literally jumped into the hands of the police who soon divested him of his assumed garb and had him locked-up. The lesson he learnt now was that a fool's folly might be as helpful to the detection as to the commission of a crime.

'Life in his own district became thereafter difficult for Malai. He was suspected by the people of every crime that was committed, and, of course, received the first attentions of the police in every investigation. He could not go anywhere without his movements being watched. He felt the situation intolerable. "It never pays to be known as a criminal" was the lesson he learnt now.

' So he went to a distant district where nobody knew him and picked up an acquaintance with a rich diamond merchant whose trusted servant in course of time he became. One day, he travelled alone with his master on an important journey. The merchant had plenty of cash and precious stones with him. They had to cross a lonely and deep ferry where there was no boatman but only a ferry boat. It was late in the evening. The merchant knew neither how to row nor swim. Malai plied the boat, and when it reached the middle of the river upset it as if by accident, took the merchant's bag and swam ashore calling out, 'Come, master, come.' The merchant called out to Malai. 'Save me, let the bag go to the bottom.' But Malai replied, 'I will first save the bag and then come for you,' and rapidly made for the shore. The unlucky merchant after a helpless struggle to keep afloat soon sank to the

bottom. Malai hid the money and precious stones securely and then went to a neighbouring village, weeping and disconsolate. He told the villagers that the boat had been upset by accident and that, despite repeated attempts on his part, he had been unable to save his master. 'Where will I get such a master?' he wailed. 'And how shall I face my master's son with this news?' The villagers consoled him, saying, 'All that was humanly possible you did. What more could any man have done?' 'At least help me in recovering the corpse of my beloved master,' said Malai, and some villagers readily agreed to go at once though it was night. After great trouble they secured the corpse. Malai rolled frantically on the ground beside the dead body of his master, and his wails were so pathetic that the hearts of all present melted. One and all declared that such devotion on the part of a serv-

ant towards his master was very rare in these degenerate days. Malai told the headman, 'Please send word to my master's son. I want to keep watch over the body till he comes.' The headman did so, and a day later the son arrived. Meanwhile the inquest had been held, and a verdict of accidental death by drowning was returned. In addition to remarks about the desirability of teaching swimming to one and all and the extreme undesirability of leaving such ferries without competent boatmen, the officer conducting the inquest had showered unbounded praise on the heroic efforts of Malai to save his master, and, in general, on the unparalleled devotion of the man towards his master. The merchant's son, after his first outburst of grief was over, asked Malai what became of his father's bag. 'When the master himself could not be saved, what need to ask about the bag?'

asked Malai, and everybody was satisfied. The merchant's son gave Malai a valuable plot of land in gratitude for the good services he had rendered his father, including the prompt recovery of his corpse.

Malai settled on the land, and built a house there. While digging the well he cleverly managed to get rumours spread to the effect that he had found a huge treasure trove. He also took up various contracts which were really unprofitable to him, but which he pretended to be profitable sources of income owing to his skill in buying materials and engaging coolies at the cheapest rates possible. He then took to diamond trading in which trade he said he had received a special training while serving his dead master. His master's son had left off trading since his father's death and had degenerated into a mere absentee landlord living on the

capital left him by his father. Ostentatiously, Malai sought his permission to take to the diamond trade, and easily got it. 'Where is the capital for this trade?' asked his old master's son. 'I have saved a little from what you and your generous father were graciously pleased to give me, I have made a little from the contracts, and I can get some credit from the merchants who traded with your worthy father,' said Malai. 'What about the treasure trove?' asked the merchant's son. 'We have found a little which the people exaggerate beyond recognition,' said Malai smiling. Then he left for distant countries with the stones stolen from the merchant and sold them at high prices. He also bought and sold an enormous quantity of stones more with a view to create evidence of a busy trade in precious stones than with any eye to profit. When he returned after eight months he gave

out that he had got a clean profit of fifty thousand rupees and presented his old master's son with a valuable ring set with sapphire of exceptional brilliance. 'Your father, my old master, is the real cause of all this fortune,' he declared with truth.

'Owing to his numerous transactions in precious stones he acquired some real skill in appraising stones and so kept on to the trade as also to his contractor's business, and began to make money from both in reality. He showed large incomes and readily paid the huge income tax. In spite of all his riches he would himself serve in his shop, and got a reputation for industry. He would say to anybody who chaffed him on his hard work that the moment a businessman became lazy his days of prosperity would be numbered. 'Every pie of my wealth except the gifts of my master and his son was earned by the

sweat of my brow,' he used to say with pride, and all believed him.

'He is now a thoroughly honest and prosperous merchant who would never dream of cheating, let alone stealing or robbing. "When dishonesty has brought about success it should be given the go-by" was the maxim he found out after a careful study of the lives of some of the richest men. What is more, he learnt also that it was politic to make big donations to good causes. His were invariably the biggest donations to any cause conducing to the public good. 'A man without charity carries his wealth even as an ass carries riches,' he used to tell everybody. He also made it a point to take a prominent part in protest meetings of all kinds, to invite men of note to dinner, and to give medals to famous musicians and athletes. With Malai,

to learn a thing was to act on it. He would often start a fund for digging a well or 'relieving some distress and, making a big donation himself, would collect subscriptions from all the other big men and get the credit of the whole enterprise. He would publish detailed accounts of the collections and expenditure and request the public to thoroughly scrutinise them. When once told that it showed lack of confidence in a public man to ask for accounts from him, he retorted 'No; on the contrary it is a proof of the public's faith in him, for the public thereby express their belief in his capacity to keep accounts and his willingness to show them. That public man who takes such a request as an insult is unworthy of the confidence of the public.'

'No wonder that Malai's name is now a synonym for honesty, industry, generosity, charity and public spirit. When I asked him

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lately what his message to the world was he said, 'Nothing except that success is a science like everything else and can be cultivated.'

'After all, though your story has to a certain extent proved your point it doesn't disprove mine,' said the heredity faddist. 'But for his sturdy body and portable-type-writer mind, which he inherited from his parents, he would never have succeeded at all. Had he been a cripple or a lunatic he would have assuredly failed.'

'Nor has my theory been disproved,' said the second gentleman. 'It was because Malai's ambition was confined to money-making that he succeeded. Had he attempted to emulate Newton or Einstein or Kalidasa or Shakespeare he would, with his portable-type-writer brain, have certainly failed. In'

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short, success depends on what a man wants to succeed in.'

'I cannot say that my theory either has been upset,' said the advocate of luck, 'for it was just luck that was responsible for the non-appearance of any persons on the spot to save the drowning merchant and bring the criminal to book.'

'All that you have said does not shake my theory about the science of success,' said the gentleman who narrated Malai's story. 'It only shows that like every science it requires certain inherited and accidental qualities in its votaries for its proper and fruitful cultivation.'

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## THE RIGHT TO HAPPINESS

**O**H, MY GOD ! ' said Sambhu to his wife Chalu as soon as he had read a telegram, saying ' Our Ammu's husband is dead ! '

' Dead ! ' exclaimed Chalu and forthwith raised a huge uproar accompanied by floods of tears and mad beatings of the breast. ' My Ammu ! My Ammu ! Only fourteen and widowed before the marriage was even consummated ! Hard is thy fate ! '

' It is most unexpected,' said Sambhu, ' though the boy was even before marriage suffering from anæmia, brought on by excessive study, nobody dreamt that he would die so soon. Oh, what shall we do ? '

All this uproar brought Ammu to the door from the kitchen where she was attending to the cooking. ' Apple of my eye ! ' said



be found by selling all Ammu's jewels. Her husband had left her nothing, so Ammu was henceforward a permanent charge on her none too prosperous father. The two thousand rupees given at the marriage by her parents, the vessels given at the same time, all these had disappeared long ago, thanks to the spendthrift nature of her husband and the penniless state his ancestors had left him in. Her husband had left only an old mother behind, an ancient widow called Thailam with a very vile tongue and huge appetite. Since the latter began to suffer want after her son's death, the former began to wag even more villainously than usual. 'It was an ill-starred day when I gave my poor son in marriage to that devil Ammu whose horoscope has caused the death of my child,' she told all the villagers. 'I wish the wretch had died instead of my son.' Poor innocent Ammu

with her childishly loving face and open heart was anathema to this hag. 'These handsome creatures must have been hardened sinners in their previous births,' said Thailam to her cronies. 'Thank God, I am not handsome.' And indeed God deserved ample thanks as Thailam was the extreme of ugliness.

But her grief over the death of her son was genuine, and Ammu respected her for that. So, some days after the death, she generously went to console the old woman, though she knew for a certainty that she would get only insults as a reward. Embracing Thailam, she said with tears, 'Mother, both of us have to live on the memory of the beloved departed. You mourn for your son, and I for my husband. Let us live together and let me make your life happy.' 'Who will feed you?' asked Thailam. 'We will both do what work

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we can and procure the wherewithal to live. If we fail and starve, we shall die the sooner and be joined to our beloved,' replied Ammu. 'I don't want to die so soon,' said the old woman with anger. 'Nor can I live with you because you constantly remind me of my dead son. If you are really sincere, you may bring me food daily from your rich parents.' 'They are not rich, they can ill afford it,' said Ammu. 'Wretch, why then did you dangle food before my eyes when you never meant to give it to me? Get out of my sight!' said Thailam. 'Mother, don't get angry. I only spoke the truth,' said Ammu. 'Then some truths had better remain untold,' replied her mother-in-law. 'I am not a registrar of truths. But I can tell you one truth. You killed my son.' 'I!' said Ammu, almost fainting. 'Yes, your horoscope did. So the astrologer says.' 'Why didn't he say it before the marriage?'

asked Ammu. 'No one is bound to say anything before the time he judges proper,' replied Thailam. 'He is a liar,' said Ammu. 'The guilty always abuse the detectives,' said Thailam. Then she found that Ammu had not shaved her head like a widow and said, 'Wretch, haven't you shaved off your hair yet? Do so at once.' Ammu sobbed. 'Young widowed girls like me don't do so,' mother. You know that. Don't tell me to do so,' said she. 'If you did really love my son, you would have shaved your head long ago and not followed the exceptions. I shaved mine on the tenth day after my husband's death,' replied her mother-in-law. 'But you were forty then. I am only fourteen,' said Ammu. 'What if my horoscope was better?' retorted Thailam. 'I would have shaved my head all the same had he died the day after my marriage. It is only hussies who

want to attract other males that do not shave their heads when widowed. Either promise to shave your head, or never see me any more.' 'Well, then, I will never see you any more, for I shall certainly not shave my head when neither the scriptures nor custom demand it,' said Ammu. 'That proves what you are. You will soon remarry even. I know sinners when I see them,' said Thailam, as she closed the door and went in.

When she got home, Ammu wept profusely and had to be consoled by her parents. They agreed with her that her beautiful hair should not be shaved off. 'So long as we live, you will be protected from insults inside this house,' said they to her. But her brother Mahadeva added that public opinion also would have to be considered. 'In the matter of the shaving, fortunately public opinion is divided as regards these young girls,' said he. 'But,

when it comes to widow remarriage——'. 'Who talked of remarriage?' asked his parents. 'That is a diabolical sin which Ammu will never commit. Don't pollute our ears with its name.'

As she went upstairs, Ammu wondered whether remarriage was really such a sin. She had read in books that widow remarriages were quite frequent and respectable in Ancient India, and she had also seen many widowers remarrying, sometimes even for the third or fourth time. Her parents and brother had attended these marriages without a word of criticism. What was good for widowers appeared to her childish mind to be good enough for widows also, but she felt ashamed to discuss the problem as she might be understood to be desiring remarriage herself. 'I am certainly not going to remarry. Then why worry now?' she said to herself.

Months passed, and the tragedy of her life became buried in ever-new experiences of the beauties of nature and in constant social and domestic activities. Ammu grew to be surpassingly handsome, and, though she avoided flowers, scents and other aids to beauty, she was the centre of attraction wherever she went. A handsome young doctor called Yegnam with a flourishing practice fell violently in love with her, and she also felt attracted towards him <sup>in</sup> spite of her best efforts to crush the nascent love springing within her. One day, when she was alone in her house, Yegnam called, and implored her with tears in his eyes to marry him. 'I cannot. It will be a sin,' said Ammu with tears running down her cheeks. 'You never loved the dead man,' said Yegnam. 'There never was enough time for you to do so. You were not really married to him at all

in the proper sense of the term. You love me and I love you. Neither God nor man can reasonably stand between us.' 'My parents consider it an unspeakable sin,' said Ammu. 'We don't live simply to please our parents,' said Yegnam. 'My parents too will not approve of my idea, but I don't go by their wishes in such a vital matter concerning my whole future life.' 'Never disobey your parents,' said Ammu. 'The marriage cannot take place. That is my final decision. Now go,' and she made a gesture as if to go in. Yegnam caught her in his strong arms, drew her towards him, and planted burning kisses on her equally burning lips. She literally blended into him and her whole frame had an experience she had never felt before. 'Dearest,' said Yegnam, 'we are one, and none shall part us.' She slowly freed herself from him and said, 'Oh, you should never have done



love?' 'Love!' exclaimed Sambhu horrified, 'how can a widow fall in love?' 'The nature of a girl of fourteen is not altered simply by your calling her married and labelling her a widow,' said his wife. 'Surely, you don't approve of her love?' asked Sambhu in alarm. 'I don't,' said Chalu. 'How can I before I know whom she loves and whether she loves any at all?' 'She is a wretch devoid of shame if she has impudently made love to anybody,' said Mahadeva.

Soon after Ammu told her parents and brother about her impending marriage. 'Yegnam loves me and I love him, and we want to marry tomorrow week. I implore your consent. Even if you withhold it, spare me your curses,' said she. 'May you and Yegnam perish,' said Mahadeva, 'for the shame you intend to bring on this household and on me! I am a priest, and none will call me in

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after this disgraceful affair gets abroad. Woe is me, that such a wretch has been born in this house!' 'Son,' said Chalu, 'what a curse you have uttered on your own sister!' 'What if she is my sister?' said he, 'any sinner is the same to me.' 'No doubt, the sin is great. But she is our own girl,' said Chalu. Then turning to Ammu she said, 'Child, while sympathising with you, I implore you to desist from this sinful act.' 'How is it sinful?' asked Ammu. 'Is it against the decrees of God? When widowers remarry even for the third or fourth time, how can it be sinful for me, a girl whose marriage was never consummated, to remarry? Surely, God is not so partial a law-giver and judge?' 'Leave God to Himself,' said her brother, 'Your father and mother are your gods here below. Obey them and desist from committing this diabolical sin.' 'I won't,' said Ammu. 'I shall,

however, save you the pain of witnessing the marriage! We shall go to Benares and marry there.' 'Surely, the holy city itself will fall as soon as this act is done,' said Mahadeva. 'The city which has not fallen in spite of extorting priests, cruel landlords and vagabond bulls will not do so simply because one poor girl, who was never really married, marries the man of her choice and gets a little joy. If it does, it will be a conclusive proof of the divine disapprobation of widow remarriage,' said Ammu. 'Why do you remain silent?' asked Chalu of Sambhu. 'Because I don't know what to say. God's will is not so clear to me as to my son, nor is the exact meaning of sin. This sudden revolution in our own family has turned my head and all my old ideas are in the melting pot. In a few months perhaps, they will take shape again till a fresh revolution comes.' 'Father, give me your

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blessing,' said Ammu prostrating before him. 'May you be happy for life?' said Sambhu. 'Mother, yours now,' said Ammu, prostrating again. 'May God make you happy!' said Chalu raising and embracing her. 'Now, brother, yours,' said Ammu, prostrating before him. 'May you enjoy life-long misery,' said Mahadeva, thrusting her away with his foot. 'Son,' said his parents, 'you are the worst sinner we have seen Kicking a suppliant, and she your sister!' 'She has blasted my life,' said he. 'Your conduct shows that you fully deserve it,' said Sambhu, 'I order you to withdraw your curse on pain of a father's curse on you.' 'Then I withdraw,' said Mahadeva, and his sister thanked him.

After Yegnam had heard of all this he sought the consent of his parents and was rewarded with fearsome curses. He received them coolly, adding, 'My medical science

tells me that love may work wonders but never hate.' 'Abandon this wretched idea and leave the unscrupulous woman alone,' said his parents. 'She is the purest girl I have seen, and I won't abandon her. We shall go to Benares and marry,' said their son. 'I shall prevent you,' said his father. 'You can't; I am of age,' said Yegnam. 'Her parents will prosecute you for kidnapping,' said his father. 'On the contrary, they have, though reluctantly, resigned themselves to the inevitable,' said Yegnam, 'and will not take any such action.' 'The wretches are in league together then?' asked his irate father. 'They are not, but like sensible people they bow to the inevitable,' replied the doctor. 'She is not even a rich widow. If you want to marry a widow, why not marry a rich one?' asked his mother, Maduram. 'It is not riches I want, it is Ammu,' said Yegnam.

'Then, go to Benares and be damned,' said his father. 'I shall. Only, I think you will be somewhat inconvenienced. For I shall be here no longer to treat you and give you medicines daily. You will have to spend a great deal and may not have the same loving care and attention. In fact, you may even lack the money to pay the medical man, and his visits will stop at once.' 'You will surely send me medicines and money?' said his father. 'I won't, if you are going to damn me or treat me as an outcast,' said Yegnam. 'Why should you swallow my tainted medicines or money?' 'Son,' said his mother, 'don't be absurd. You know that we are poor and that your father is a hopeless invalid requiring daily treatment. You know also that without your medicine and money we should soon starve to death. Do you want to commit patricide and matricide in addition

to your present sin?' 'I am determined to cut off the supply of both medicines and money unless you give your consent to this marriage,' said Yegnam. 'Son, you have often told me that a consent got by compulsion is worthless. Then, why seek my consent by threats?' said his father. 'Because you want to compel me to give up my marriage. Compulsion is met by compulsion and the stronger party wins. That is the law of war,' said Yegnam. 'Then I surrender, but under protest,' said his father. 'Now, mother?' said Yegnam, 'Let at least the girl implore my consent,' said she. Ammu was sent for, and in half an hour Maduram was combing the girl's beautiful hair and decking it with flowers. 'Flowers, mother?' said Ammu hesitatingly. 'Yes, flowers. I don't see why my daughter-in-law should not have flowers,' said Maduram.

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Then Maduram accompanied the girl to her house and told Chalu that the marriage would take place in the village itself. 'I am overjoyed,' said Chalu and forthwith communicated the news to Sambhu and Mahadeva. 'It is mighty good of her to say so,' said Sambhu. 'A marriage in the village will be more ruinous to me than one in Benares,' said Mahadeva. 'You will be ruined anywhere with that selfish mentality of yours,' said Maduram, 'and you will deserve it.' 'Of course, if you press me, I shall be one of the priests,' said he. 'Quite unnecessary,' said Maduram, 'Yegnam has already arranged for a priest who has agreed to perform the ceremony.' 'Will the village attend?' asked Mahadeva. 'Of course. At first the villagers were inclined to boycott the function, but, when Yegnam made it clear that he could never attend on the sick in the families that

boycotted his marriage, the great majority agreed to attend.' 'What a revolution the country is making!' said Mahadeva. 'Post-puberty marriages, and now widow remarriages! What next?' 'The weeding out of idiots like you,' said Maduram and departed.

At home she found Thailam waiting for her. 'So you agreed to this immoral marriage, did you?' asked Thailam in fury. 'Beggar, get out!' said Maduram. 'Immoral marriage indeed?' 'What about my dead son?' asked Thailam. 'He will be more dead than ever,' replied the other, and drove the hag out. 'Will Thailam attend the marriage, mother?' asked Yegnam. 'Of course, she will. Where else will she get such sumptuous meals for four days?' replied Maduram.

The marriage went off splendidly. The villagers were at first rather uneasy, but the

feasts and music parties soon made them completely at ease. A few abstained from the feasts but attended the music parties. Yegnam and Ammu moved freely among them all. Thailam was, as predicted, punctual at all dinners, and, strange to say, did not utter one vile word about the marriage. Chalu wondered at this conduct so contrary to her nature, but her wonder vanished when Ammu told her that Yegnam had bought her silence for five rupees with a promise of more if the good behaviour continued. 'Doctor, on what unimpeachable ground can we justify widow remarriage?' asked a sympathetic friend some days later of Yegnam. 'On every human being's right to happiness,' replied the doctor.

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## FATE IS MOSTLY WHAT WE MAKE IT

**R**UKMANI and Lakshmi were the only children of Doraswamy, a Brahmin widower with some little landed property in the village of Ramapuram. Both the daughters were brought up in rigid orthodoxy and were left uneducated and entirely innocent of any worldly knowledge. Rukmani was married at the age of eleven to Viswanath, a man who had lost all his property in civil and criminal litigation. As he had nowhere to go to, Viswanath needed little persuasion to settle in his father-in-law's house and raise up a progeny for the spiritual salvation of his wife's parents and their countless ancestors. Before any children were born to him, however, Doraswamy died. 'What a pity he did not live till I had a son and he adopted him!'

said Viswanath to himself. 'As it is, the beggar goes to hell, and I fare no better since I shall enjoy only half the property as Lakshmi will take the other half. My wife's share will just suffice to pay off my debts. I shall be a pauper and my life will be a hell on earth, which is infinitely worse than a spiritual hell as the body will suffer and not merely that invisible and unfeeling part of ourselves, the soul. Oh well, it's no use crying over spilt milk. The wise man reckons with the unsatisfactory present and does not waste his energy in either weeping over an irrevocable past or waiting for an unrealizable ideal future. I must delay the marriage of Lakshmi as long as possible. Thus alone can I enjoy the whole income of the family property. Thank God, she is only seven years old and I am her guardian.'

A year after Doraswamy's death Rukmani presented her husband with a sturdy little boy. 'The beggar has come a year too late,' was Viswanath's comment. 'The Fates seem to be working against me. All my suits I have consistently lost, and even the birth of this child shows the malignancy of the powers that be.' In quick succession, within the next three years, were born three more children, this time girls. 'First a drought, next a flood, and both equally ruinous to me,' said Viswanath. But Nature asserted itself, and Viswanath loved his children as fondly as if they had arrived at the proper time through the special grace of the gods. As for Rukmani and Lakshmi, they doted on the children who, in turn, loved them passionately.

Four years passed after Doraswamy's death, years of constant litigation and expense for Viswanath. At the end of this period

the creditors sued him for their debts as they realized that Lakshmi's marriage was approaching and that Rukmani's property was only just sufficient to discharge their debts. The courts, of course, passed decrees with costs against Viswanath, and warrants were taken out against him for his arrest and detention in a civil jail as he had no assets, since Rukmani's lands were her separate property and could not be attached for her husband's debts. Viswanath wept and moaned as the bailiffs came to take him away, and as the cunning creditors had expected, Rukmani sold her lands and got him released. There was absolutely nothing left for Viswanath, Rukmani and the children except the income from Lakshmi's lands. But that was bound to disappear as soon as Lakshmi married. But there was a pressing suit which Viswanath wanted to file against

his creditors for damaging his reputation by having him arrested when they knew that his wife, who was himself in law, had enough property to discharge his debts and would readily have discharged them as her subsequent conduct showed. The only thing wanting to launch this "dead cert" suit was the money for the court fee stamp and lawyer's fees. The sum to be claimed as damages was ten thousand rupees, not at all an excessive amount considering the heinousness of the offence and the terrible injury sustained by him, his wife, children and sister-in-law in the shape of damage to reputation and mental worry and anxiety. 'The beauty of the English law of torts consists in this assessment of damages for mental worry and anxiety,' said Viswanath to Rukmani. 'Ah, yes,' said that lady languidly just to please her husband. 'But, of course, it is not without

its defects as you realized when you had to pay a substantial amount to that fellow Kunhircman for alleged mental worry and anxiety though these seemed to have improved his health a good bit.' 'Ah, well, but law is not always commonsense, and therein lies a good deal of its beauty and efficacy,' replied her husband, 'and, besides, you know that in that case the judge was bribed by the opposite party.' 'Is there any case which you lost, and you know you lost them all, wherein the judge was not bribed by the opposite party?' asked Rukmani, her patience exhausted. 'Why should I have lost them all, if the judges were not bribed? Think of it, dear. Should I not have won at least half my cases had there been no foul play?' retorted Viswanath. 'But there is no use talking to you. You always take the side of my enemies.' 'Have

I too been bribed by them?' asked his wife in disgust. 'Sometimes you compel me to think so,' replied Viswanath. Rukmani kept silent. For a long time past she had realized what a worthless fellow her husband was. But the folly of her father could not be mended in the orthodox society in which she was living, nor had she the spirit of revolt within her. So after the usual ineffectual protests she had submitted tamely to all the foolish actions of her husband. 'I have had my say; and if he will not listen to wisdom, the fault is his,' she used to think.

'Dearest,' said Viswanath to Rukmani the next evening, rushing to her excitedly, 'a brilliant idea has come to me; if you approve of it, the problem of how to find money for the suit and to maintain ourselves and the children will be solved.' Rukmani's eyes shone. It was a new thing to find her

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husband worrying himself about the problem of maintenance, much more to find him succeeding in finding a solution. She asked eagerly, 'Have you been offered a job?' 'Oh, no; you know I am constitutionally unfit for work,' said Viswanath. 'Then, what is your grand plan to maintain us?' asked Rukmani, becoming languid once again. 'Marry Lakshmi, of course, and maintain you all with the income from her lands,' replied Viswanath. 'Are you mad?' asked Rukmani in anger. 'Is it not enough for you to have wasted my life that you should think of contracting a second marriage and ruining my sister's life as well? You shall never marry my sister.' 'All right, then, be prepared to starve. For, once Lakshmi marries some other body, the income from her lands will go to him, and we shall be left with nothing.' 'You must do some work and earn

something,' said his wife. 'I too will do odd jobs like selling sweetmeats, milk and buttermilk. Between the two of us we shall maintain ourselves and the children.' 'Don't count on me. I cannot earn anything as I have never been accustomed to work and indeed never will work,' replied Viswanath. 'And yet you call yourself a man!' said Rukmani. 'I don't. Biologists call me a man since Nature out of pure accident or set malignity, it is difficult to say which, made me of the male sex.' 'There is no doubt that you are right,' replied Rukmani. 'But you shall not trade further on this accidental manhood. Drop for ever this stupid idea of marrying my sister, and think of some honourable way of eking out a living.' 'One word more,' said her husband. 'All your sacrifice in selling your lands and paying off my creditors will be in vain if Lakshmi-

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marries another since I shall be sent to a criminal jail for a fairly long term.' 'How so?' demand Rukmani. 'Her husband will assuredly ask for the accounts of the income and expenditure from her property during the period of her minority and will file a complaint against me for criminal breach of trust in respect of the thousand five hundred rupees I have spent out of it to maintain ourselves.' 'Surely, Lakshmi will not allow him to do that,' said Rukmani. 'Without a doubt she will,' replied her husband. 'Once she is away from us she will only care for her husband and her money. Even if she evinces some scruples, her husband will allay them by persuasion, aided, if necessary, by beating.' 'I did not think of this before,' replied Rukmani. 'What if we make Lakshmi give us a letter before marriage saying that she has been rendered due

accounts for the management of her property till then?' 'It will be absolutely useless as a minor's statement is worthless in law, especially when given in favour of her guardian at a time when the guardianship still subsists. I tell you, the only solution is for me to marry Lakshmi. I can't see why you object. It is not that you are on principle opposed to polygamy as you have attended the second marriage of your uncle. I hardly see why you desire that poor girl to be thrust on some brutal stranger who may murder her for her property. In any case, you will but rarely see her after marriage if she marries a stranger, whereas if she marries me you will be with her always and she will also be happy.' Rukmani hesitated. Her strong opposition to the marriage had been weakened by her husband's cunning arguments. 'The interests of all of us, including Lakshmi,

require that I should marry her,' said Viswanath. 'Well, if Lakshmi agrees to the proposal, I shall not stand in the way,' said his wife. 'Fancy asking Lakshmi about it!' said Viswanath. 'What does the child know about such things? We, her guardians, must do what is good for her. Who consulted us about our marriage, and yet, has there been a happier marriage?' Rukmani yawned. 'I tell you, the child need not be consulted. It may frighten the poor thing unnecessarily,' continued her husband. 'Do as you like,' said Rukmani, 'I shall agree to the marriage on one condition, namely, that you swear never to indulge in any litigation in future without my express consent. Let the girl's money at least, be safe from courts and lawyers.' 'It is an unreasonable condition,' said Viswanath. 'You know nothing of courts and suits and so re not a proper judge of what suits should be

filed and what not.' 'I know enough of courts and lawyers to grasp the fundamental fact that those who resort to them too often lose what little they have. You must take the oath or I will not give my consent,' said Rukmani. 'I consider your demand most unreasonable, but yet, for the sake of peace and Lakshmi, I will swear as you want,' said Viswanath and gave the requisite oath.

Word was soon sent to Lakshmi's paternal uncle's son about the intentions of Viswanath and Rukmani, and he was requested to come and give away the bride. This cousin was a shrewd man and was not deceived by the professions of altruism of Viswanath and his spouse. 'These people are after Lakshmi's land, and I do not see why I should help in this marriage,' said he to the messenger. He replied to Viswanath that he would be present at the marriage and give

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away the bride only if he were given half the lands of Lakshmi. Viswanath was greatly put out at this impudent demand, and so indeed was Rukmani. They resolved not to give a pie to the cousin and to get the marriage celebrated somehow without his help. The cousin offered to take a lesser sum, but all in vain. His travelling expenses and good meals during the marriage days were the utmost Viswanath and Rukmani would offer. So he gave up negotiating and started a vigorous propaganda against the marriage, falsely alleging that he would never assist at such an iniquitous transaction however great a reward were offered to him. It became impossible for Viswanath to marry <sup>2</sup>Lakshmi in his native village as public opinion was strong against the marriage. He and his wife, therefore, resolved to go to the famous emple of Rameswaram and get married there.

So they started with their children and Lakshmi for Rameswaram. They told Lakshmi that they were going on a pilgrimage, and the girl was very pleased.

On reaching Rameswaram, Viswanath interviewed a priest called Appu Sastri and spoke to him about the marriage. He told him that it must be celebrated the very next day. The cunning priest guessed from this as well as from the polygamous nature of the marriage that Viswanath stood to gain a great deal from it, and so demanded fifty rupees instead of the usual fee of ten rupees. 'I shall seek another priest,' said Viswanath. 'I shall warn all the other priests about the suspicious nature of the marriage and shall also inform the police,' replied the priest. 'We are doing nothing criminal,' said Viswanath. 'How dare you say that the marriage is suspicious?' 'Don't get excited,' said the priest. 'Where is

the bride's nearest relation to give her away? You can't deceive us who are in the trade. Of course, I am willing to ask no questions provided you are a little accommodating. I can be bribed but not bullied.' The fear that the girl's cousin would arrive soon and the certainty that the priest was an old bandicoot who knew his game well, made Viswanath agree to the exorbitant payment. The priest retired with a humble bow and a smile of satisfaction.

The next day, three hours before the marriage, Rukmani broached the subject to Lakshmi. 'What, sister, I to marry my brother-in law? What nonsense are you talking?' said Lakshmi. 'My dear, has not Kaveri married her elder sisters's husband?' asked Rukmani. 'Yes, but her sister was dead when she married,' replied Lakshmi. 'I wish I too were dead,' said Rukmani. 'Don't say

that,' said Lakshmi. 'Come, now, tell me why you want me to marry him.' 'We have no money, and only your lands will enable us to feed ourselves and the children,' replied Rukmani. 'But, child, don't sacrifice yourself for our sake.' 'I will gladly do anything you like except marry my brother-in-law. He has already got a wife and four children and besides he is old. Sister, I tell you what, I will remain for ever unmarried and so you can enjoy my lands always.' Rukmani embraced her little sister and said, 'You are a darling and I am a miserable wretch devoid of human feelings and common decency. I cannot accept your sacrifice. I am ashamed of having opened this topic to you. We will return without the marriage. I shall rejoice at the discomfiture of that rascally priest who wanted to trade on our necessity. In due course, you can marry whom you

like.' 'Why can't I remain unmarried?' asked Lakshmi. 'Our religion wants all women to marry,' said Rukmani, 'though I have never been able to understand why. They say that a husband will provide for the wife and children though my husband is a standing example of one who not only does not provide like that but even has to be provided for by his wife or sister-in-law. A miserable destiny made us women, and so we suffer. If we were males, we could have remained unmarried, gone about where we liked, enjoyed our freedom and lived a happy life. Now all that is impossible.' At this stage Viswanath came. 'Cancel all arrangements for the marriage,' said Rukmani to him. 'Lakshmi is not willing, and she is right.' 'Nonsense!' said Viswanath. 'It is too late to withdraw. I have already paid an advance of twenty-five rupees to that devil of a priest and spent another twenty-

five on materials for the marriage. All this has been done with borrowed money. So we have nothing to do but to proceed with the marriage. Else, we shall lose our money and, what is more valuable than money, our self-respect.' Rukmani looked bewildered. 'I am responsible for all this. If I had only held out that day and resisted your ridiculous idea, all this would not have happened.' 'Certainly not,' said Viswanath, anxious to shift the responsibility from his own shoulders. 'I feel ill,' said Rukmani and sank to the ground from sheer mental weariness. Viswanath hurriedly took her inside, put her to bed, and took Lakshmi away saying, 'You have made your sister ill with your disobedient conduct. All that you have to do to make her well again is to have a mock marriage with me simply to please the priest who will otherwise do evil to us.' 'Is it only a mock marriage?' asked Lakshmi.

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‘What else?’ asked Viswanath. ‘Would I, who have a wife already, marry you also? Can’t you see that all this is but a test by Rukmani of your affection for her and the children?’ ‘So there will be a real marriage for me later on?’ asked the girl. ‘Of course,’ replied Viswanath. ‘You can marry whom you will.’ ‘Then, come along, we will have this mock marriage. You are sure it is only a mock marriage?’ said Lakshmi. ‘If it were a real marriage, would it not be celebrated in our own village and would there not be your cousin and numerous others present? What a fool you are!’ And Viswanath laughed. The poor girl of eleven, deceived into the belief that it was but a mock marriage, accompanied her brother-in-law to the place where the priest had made the arrangements. Viswanath asked her not to reveal the fact that she knew that the marriage was not a real one lest the priest should be angry at

being fooled. In an hour the priest finished the essential ceremonies and made them man and wife. They returned to their residence and found Rukmani recovering. 'The whole thing is over,' said Viswanath to her. 'You are a shameless wretch,' said she furiously. 'It was only mock marriage,' said Lakshmi laughing. 'Why didn't you tell me that before, sister? Then I would have agreed long ago.' Rukmani called her husband aside and asked, 'Wretch, have you deceived her also?' 'What else could I do? Necessity knows no law,' was his shameless reply. Rukmani could not find it in her heart to tell Lakshmi of the fraud which had been practised on her. She resolved to defer it to a later time when Lakshmi would be older and understand things better.

The party returned home and resumed their normal life. There was absolutely no difference in the treatment accorded to

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Lakshmi, and in a few months she forgot the mock marriage. Rukmani extorted from her husband a promise not to broadcast the fact of the marriage till Lakshmi had attained puberty. So nobody learnt of the marriage. Lakshmi began to study for herself and soon became well-read. New ideas too began to permeate her. Seven years passed, and she attained puberty. Then Rukmani confidentially told her about the fraud since the nuptial ceremony, after which she would have to live as a wife, would have to take place shortly. Lakshmi heard the news with surprise and indignation. 'The fraud vitiates the marriage if ever there was one,' said she. 'So it should, but according to our law-givers it does not,' replied Rukmani. 'I am not going to sacrifice my life to please dead law-givers,' said Lakshmi. 'What! you mean to break the immemorial laws of our country?' asked Ruk-

mani in utter bewilderment. 'Yes, such of those laws as are a disgrace to our country,' replied Lakshmi. 'You astonish me by your revolutionary sentiments,' said Rukmani. 'You astonish me even more by your utter resignation to fraud, oppression and injustice,' said Lakshmi. 'We are tools in the hands of Fate. None of us can over-ride Fate,' said her sister. 'Has anybody ever tried?' asked Lakshmi. 'None would be foolish enough to try,' said Rukmani. 'I shall be fool enough, then,' said Lakshmi. 'I tell you, Fate is mostly what we make it.'

With difficulty Rukmani persuaded Viswanath to put off the nuptial ceremony a year and consider the advisability of getting Lakshmi's consent in view of her ownership of the all-important property. Six months later, Lakshmi was missing from her house. Vis-

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vanath was all anxiety, but Rukmani was unmoved. 'You must have assisted in her escape,' he told her fiercely. She replied 'What if I have? You married her by fraud and it is only right that she should be freed from this bondage.' 'Wretch, have you also fallen a victim to the depraved doctrines of the present age?' he asked and belaboured her mercilessly. 'Tell me her hiding place or I will kill you,' he declared. 'Kill me, it will be a welcome relief,' she replied. 'Dare you defy me?' he asked. 'Am I not your God on earth?' 'My devil, rather,' she replied. 'We prize and indigined now,' said he. 'Better marriage if ever thives than ruin an innocent it should, but accollied. 'I shall be sent to does not,' replied Rukaned. 'It will do you to sacrifice my life to plet, he again belabour-said Lakshmi. 'What! ygie,' said she, 'then immemorial laws of our co<sup>pl</sup>less.' Thereupon

he redoubled his blows, while the children rushed into the streets crying out that their father was killing their mother. Neighbours came and rescued Rukmani from the clutches of Viswanath. Rukmani told them that her husband had gone off his head and was under the delusion that he had married Lakshmi. 'It is no delusion ; I have really married her,' said Viswanath. 'Appu Sastri knows it and will testify to it tomorrow if you want.' 'This Appu Sastri has been dead these two years and yet my poor husband talks of citing him as a witness to this alleged transaction. The disappearance of Lakshmi has affected his brains and for the first time in our married life he has beaten me mercilessly,' said Rukmani. 'Who aided her escape but you, you shameless wretch ? I shall prosecute you for abetment of kidnapping,' bawled out

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Viswanath. 'His condition is pitiful,' said Rukmani. 'Pray, do not excite him.' The neighbours expressed their sympathy with her and asked her to avoid him for some time lest he should harm her. Meanwhile, hearing of Lakshmi's flight and the passing of her property from Viswanath's control, the creditor, who had lent Viswanath money to go to Rameswaram and had got a decree for it but had deferred its execution in the hope that he would pay the amount in instalments out of the income from Lakshmi's lands, now lost all hopes in that direction and had him arrested and hauled off to the civil jail. He had fondly hoped that Rukmani would take over the debt as before and pay at least a portion of it rather than allow her husband to go to jail. But this time Viswanath's helpless cries and threats as he was being dragged away left his wife unmoved. 'It is best for

him,' said Rukmani to herself, 'it will take the nonsense out of him. The lack of the good meals I give him will make him ruminate on the realities of life. Incidentally, his absence will enable me to save something from the milk, buttermilk and sweetmeat business. He was eating so much of them that there was little to sell.'

For six months Viswanath enjoyed the amenities of a civil jail at the expense of his creditor. When the latter lost all hopes of Rukmani's paying up the money, he refused to pay any more for Viswanath's detention in jail, and so that worthy was set at liberty. Thereupon, Viswanath rushed to his wife and said, 'Wretched woman, you caused me all this misery,' and was about to enter the house when Rukmani called a policeman and had him ejected. 'Why do you throw me out of my own house?' he asked the constable.

'It is not your house but the house of Rukmani and Lakshmi. What house have you got, you vagabond?' asked the policeman. Viswanath reeled back into the street and wandered aimlessly about till dawn. The cool night air calmed him, and darkness and hunger cowed him. Where was he to go for his meals? Even the civil jail had closed its gates against him. He resolved to make his peace with his wife. He went back to her house at break of day, and standing at the gate, said humbly, 'Dearest, take pity on me and let me in. Forgive me for my insolence. My delusions are gone and I am now alive to reality. I freely confess that I never married Lakshmi and that my assertion that I married her was a madman's delusion. More, I will faithfully serve you as a servant. I shall sell the sweetmeats and milk without devouring one

scrap more than you give me.' 'Come in, I will give you one more chance,' said his wife and let him in and gave him a good meal. For the next three months Viswanath faithfully did whatever Rukmani asked him to do, and the sweetmeat, milk, and buttermilk business flourished exceedingly. 'Where is Lakshmi?' asked Viswanath at the end of this period. 'I solemnly promise never more to harass her. I have sincerely repented of my conduct.' 'She is in her maternal grandmother's house,' said Rukmani, 'and last month married the prosperous lawyer Raghu. She is calling on us tomorrow.' The next morning, Lakshmi and Raghu paid them a visit. 'Have you quite recovered from your delusions?' asked Raghu of Viswanath. 'Quite, thank you,' said Viswanath. 'My wife cured me.' Turning to Rukmani, Raghu said, 'I am, as you know, fairly well-to-do and can manage without my

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wife's money. She is now of age and has gifted you with the lands she inherited from her father. Here is the deed,' and he handed over the deed. The whole family expressed there infinite gratitude. 'Now the sweetmeat, milk, and buttermilk business will stop,' said Rukmani. 'Let us eat the sweetmeats prepared for sale today and drink the milk.' While they were engaged in this delightful operation, Rukmani said to Lakshmi, 'After all, you were right. Fate is mostly what we make it.'

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## SLAVES OF CUSTOM

**D**HARMAMBAL completes her thirteenth year today though I have told every body that she is only eleven, knowing that nobody will believe me. She ought to have been married two years ago. Anyhow, she must be married this year; else, she will attain puberty and bring disgrace on our family. Dearest, you must be up and doing,' said Kamakshi to her husband Ramasubban, a clerk in a merchant's warehouse.

'What am I to do?' asked Ramasubban, 'I get only Rs. 75 as my share of the ancestral property. I am getting only twelve rupees a month from my firm. In spite all this, I have succeeded in giving our first daughter in marriage to a fairly decent man, handing over our whole capital of Rs. 200 plus a loan of Rs. 300 as dowry. The creditors are

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dunning me for the loan amount. God alone knows how I am to repay it. With things like this, you want me to marry off our second daughter. In these days who will marry a girl without money? And money is the one thing I have not got and so far as I can prophesy, will not get for a good long time to come. Dharmambal is pretty and sings like an angel. Someeody ought to come and marry her for nothing, if there is justice in this world. If none comes, let her remain in the house as a help to us all.'

' But, darling, what will people say ? '

' Damn people ! '

' A long established custom cannot be broken with impunity,' said Kamakshi. ' We shall surely be treated as out-castes.'

' What am I to do ? The only alternative is to give Dharmambal in marriage to some

aged widower with one foot in the grave. I don't think you will agree to that. '

' Well, it is a most horrible thing for the girl. But what else are we to do ? For the good of all concerned we shall have to do that if nobody will lend you anything more,' said his wife.

' No one will lend me a pie,' said Ramasubban. ' The only thing to do is to marry our Dharmambal to some wretch about to expire, some fellow devoid of ideals or romance, a perpetual invalid and crass materialist looking at the world through dead eyes from which any fire which once existed has departed long ago. '

' Don't draw so gloomy a picture,' said his wife. ' It makes me shrink from such a marriage though I know that it is clearly my duty to agree to it rather than leave her unmarried and bring ruin on her and on us. '

‘No use hiding facts,’ said Ramasubban, ‘but perhaps there is as little use in shedding useless tears over the inevitable. I shall get a month’s leave and see what I can do.’

‘Do,’ said Kamakshi.

A month passed, and Ramasubban had fixed things up with a government servant fifty four years old, drawing a salary of two hundred rupees. Many fathers had competed for him, but the fair features of Dharmambal had made Sankaranarayan decide in her favour. So it was with a look of real triumph that Ramasubban returned home and broke the news to his wife.

‘Dearest,’ he said, ‘a very good match Dharmambal need not worry for food or clothing. She will be a big officer’s wife and one of the leaders of society wherever she is. Thank God we succeeded in securing such a desirable bridegroom as Sankaranarayan. He

may even lend us a few rupees without interest whenever we need a loan. That is also an incidental advantage which should not be forgotten.'

'How old is he?' asked Kamakshi without enthusiasm.

'About fifty, but he looks forty,' said her husband.

'Is he not fifty-four, and has he not lost all his teeth? Have not his hair and eye-brows gone grey, his forehead furrowed, are not his cheeks hanging and his eyes sunken? You and I both saw him. Why hide the facts?'

'He may be all that and more, but he is an officer drawing two hundred rupees a month, and he will wed Dharmambal without any dowry,' said Ramasubban.

'Is this not his third marriage? Has he not got four children by his first wife and six by his second?'

'Yes, but he is young enough to have two children by Dharmambal and complete the dozen,' replied Ramasubban.

'Poor girl !' said Kamakshi. 'Well, has he at least insured his life for a good amount ?'

'How can I ask him that ? So far as I learnt, he has not done so,' said her husband.

'Then you must insist on his insuring his life,' said Kamakshi.

'What company will agree to issue a policy to him now?' asked Ramasubban.

'So it is to such a worthless life that we are going to yoke Dharmambal's?' asked Kamakshi.

'Hang it all ! I shall drop the match since you are so critical,' said Ramasubban. 'Let the girl remain unmarried and ruin us all.'

At this stage Kamakshi observed Dharmambal standing close by and weeping. 'Dharmambal,' she said, 'go and attend to the cooking; you need not come here till I call you.' Then, with the doors closed and in a more subdued tone, the discussion proceeded.

'Well,' said Kamakshi, 'perhaps I am too critical. But, when it comes to a question affecting the girl's whole life, how can you blame me for being so? And since widow remarriage is prohibited in our land, it is doubly odious to yoke a young girl to an old man.'

'You are right,' replied her husband. 'But we have no other way out. After all some marriages between old men and young girls have been happy.'

'Yes, when the girls have resigned themselves to their fate and when the old men

have been too old to create any trouble. Then the wives just become unpaid nurses of these invalids and might find life not altogether intolerable if only widow remarriage were in vogue. Even so, their lives will never be happy.'

'Is not a rich old man preferable to a young beggar who can never feed his wife?' asked Ramasubban.

'Emphatically, no,' replied Kamakshi. 'Poverty can be borne and remedied, but never old age. Old age is a perpetual fog hiding the sun of happiness from the young wife.'

'Then, what shall we do?' asked Ramasubban. 'Shall we defy custom?'

'Alas, I don't feel equal to it. Nor do you. A poor merchant's clerk and his wife have had their backs too thoroughly broken by poverty and fear to defy custom and

society. We are slaves of custom and shall continue to be so since we have not got the will or power to break our chains,' replied his wife.

'Why not try to break them?' asked Ramasubban.

'Even the elephant with all its strength does not attempt to break its chains when it knows their strength. We can never break our chains, so why commit the folly of attempting to do so?' asked Kamakshi.

'Society then demands the sacrifice of Dharmambal. It is a monster, a man-eating monster,' said Ramasubban.

'More a woman-eating monster in our country,' said Kamakshi.

'Why were we ever born in this land?' asked Ramasubban.

'Because we were,' said Kamakshi. 'There is no other answer to such questions. Now,

let us come to the main problem. I suppose we shall have to settle the marriage with Sankaranarayan.'

'Just now you were against it!' said Ramasubban.

'No. I just pointed out the disadvantages and the horrors of such an alliance. But we have to resign ourselves to the inevitable. Just as I gave a four month babe to the devouring earth, so I must give a fourteen-year maiden to old age to undergo a living death.'

'Well, then, shall I write to Sankaranarayan that the marriage is settled and ask him to print the invitation cards?'

'Yes,' said Kamakshi. 'Dharmambal, my Dharmambal, dreadful is your fate since you too like us were born a slave of custom,' and she burst into tears.

'Mother, don't weep,' said Dharmambal opening the door and wiping her mother's tears.

'Child, were you listening to everything through the key-hole?' asked Kamakshi in consternation. Dharmambal stood silent and ashamed. 'Well, since you have heard it all, there is nothing more to be said to you,' said Kamakshi and went inside the house.

Fifteen days later, a grand marriage was celebrated at Ramasubban's house. The elite of the town were present at the feasts and tea parties. The banquets were superb, and the music of the highest quality. Gay crowds frequented the marriage pavilion night and day for four days. The bride and bridegroom were the recipients of numerous presents, congratulations and blessings. The gaiety was infectious. Even Kamakshi was full of mirth, and the weight of sorrow seemed to

have lifted completely out of her mind as well as from her husband's. As for Dharmambal, clad in her rich silks and adorned with precious gold and diamond ornaments, she looked a most charming maiden and her face and eyes expressed her joy to superficial onlookers. In a small interlude, when she got Dharmambal to herself, Kamakshi asked her, 'Child, are you not supremely happy?' 'Happy!' said Dharmambal, 'you were right, mother, when you said that a poor beggar is far preferable to a rich old man.' 'So it was all a pose?' asked Kamakshi. 'Of course,' said Dharmambal. 'The pose of a slave of custom, just the same as yours and father's. Kamakshi's face and eyes suddenly showed an inexpressible sadness, and, as she looked at the equally sad face and eyes of her daughter, she exclaimed involuntarily, 'Why were we born?' 'Why indeed?' asked Dhar-

mambal. 'But born we are and have to make the best of a bad business.' Mother and daughter separated, each wearing the former assumed look of happiness. Ramasubban approached his wife and said, 'So, I was right and this has turned out to be a very good match.' But the look of contempt in his wife's eyes froze his flow of eloquence.

Six months passed, and Dharmambal was-keeping house for Sankaranarayan and looking after his ten children, many of whom were far older than herself. Her husband turned out to be physically even worse than her mother had depicted, for Kamakshi had seen him when touched up and bedecked as a candidate for marriage. Divested of his artificial aids to youth, his old age was visible with a savage insistence. Daily he had to take three medicines, one for asthma, another for rheumatism and a third for stomach-ache. He used specta-

cles with extra thick lenses and even so saw only imperfectly. His memory was like a sieve, and he was constantly forgetting his spectacles, walking stick, fountain pen, keys, etc., and making Dharmambal search for them. Toothache alone did not trouble him for he had lost all his real teeth and had only dentist's ones. Massaging was a vital necessity to him, and, as he dispensed with his masseur, as soon as Dharmambal went to him, she was allotted this duty also. He would keep his wife awake the whole night by his incessant coughing. Sometimes there would be bouts which seemed to take the poor man's breath away. Dharmambal felt repelled at this old man's amorous advances though she felt genuine pity for him as a sick old man. All day long she had to cook and wash and do a thousand other household duties. Her husband was a great miser and

had dispensed with the cook and maid servant as soon as she entered the house. 'Your cooking is better than a mercenary's and no maid servant will wash so cleanly as you,' he told her with the flattery of which he was such a master. Whenever he wanted to effect other savings, he used to tell her, 'You see, our marriage cost me a good bit and my sons consented to the enormous expenditure only on condition that I showed extra savings to that extent within the next three years. The beggars allotted me mentally only three more years of existence, fancy!' Dharmambal shuddered in spite of herself. The suggestion that her husband would die in  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years shocked her though cool reason told her that he would not last even so long.

There was nothing to do but resign herself to the inevitable. The jewels with which she was loaded at marriage had been bor-

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rowed from her husband's daughters and other relations and were, of course, duly returned. Dharmambal was thus left with only the few trinkets her father had given her. When at the prompting of her mother, she opened the topic of more jewels to her husband his reply was characteristic. 'Jewels are an artificial aid to beauty and are required only where real beauty is wanting. So they are absolutely unnecessary in your case.' 'Then why did you load me with jewels on the date of marriage?' asked Dharmambal. 'Simply to satisfy public opinion. Oh, there is my cough again,' and he went on coughing as if he would die. 'He turns even his diseases to good account,' thought Dharmambal, as she turned away.

One day, Sankaranarayan went with Dharmambal to a distant place by train. They alighted and were walking down the platform

after giving up their tickets, when the station-master, a casual acquaintance of Sankaranarayan, remarked, looking at Dharmambal, 'A smart girl, sir. Is it your grand-daughter?' At which remark Sankaranarayan literally dragged Dharmambal after him and stalked away with an offended air, to the great wonder of the railway worthy. After this incident Sankaranarayan never took Dharmambal with him on any journey or walk.

Even the normal relations between husband and wife had an artificial and almost comical air. Sankaranarayan, being old and feeble, had not the strength to run after his wife and kiss her or embrace her. Nor did Dharmambal feel the least inclination to kiss or embrace this repulsive old man, of her own accord. So, whenever Sankaranarayan, felt the need for a kiss or embrace, he would say to his wife, 'Dharmambal, come and give me

a kiss' or 'Dharmambal, embrace me,' and she would do it merely as a matter of duty. Once, the need for love overcoming her natural repugnance, she hugged him so hard that he shrieked, ordered her to release him, asked her whether she wanted to strangle him, and then spent half an hour nursing his ribs which, he alleged, she had broken. Dharmambal was overwhelmed with shame and anger and wished she were dead. But as she still lived there was nothing left but to continue the old role.

As soon as Sankaranarayan completed his fifty-fifth year the Government pensioned him off despite his frantic petitions for an extension. His failure to get an extension preyed upon him and still more soured his already bad temper. He was free now to pester his wife during the daytime also.

'This miserable old man with a dozen diseases and no virtues, what did you find in him that you married him?' asked a feminist leader of Dharmambal in the course of a friendly chat. 'As if we women in India have any choice,' replied Dharmambal. 'We marry those whom our parents bring to us. It is all a lottery, and often the stakes, our lives, are lost. Perhaps that is so, to some extent, in all systems of marriage, but the special evil is that we are all compelled to gamble, that no Hindu girl can remain unmarried without bringing shame and ruin to herself and those around her.' 'That is so,' replied the feminist, 'and we are out to end the evil.' At this juncture Sankaranarayan peremptorily called Dharmambal and she had to leave, bidding a speedy adieu to the indignant feminist. 'Why do you obey him?' shouted the feminist. 'Because custom

requires it, and I am a slave of custom,' replied Dharmambal as she hurried away.

Nine months later, Shankaranarayan died after a prolonged illness. He left no will behind, and all his properties went to his sons, who offered Dharmambal only bare meals and clothing on condition that she shaved her head, wore white clothes and lived with them as their cook, maid-servant and general drudge. 'Dharmambal, don't consent to do it. Go to some Widows' Home, and study,' urged the feminist. 'Nobody has done it before in my family or village. How can I go against custom!' asked Dharmambal. 'Damn custom!' said the feminist. 'Custom is the mill stone round the neck of India's womanhood. Cast it off and be free.' 'I haven't the courage to do so,' wailed poor Dharmambal, her fair head with its luxuriant raven hair resting on

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her exquisite bosom, in deep sorrow. 'Having been a slave of custom so long, I have lost the courage to be free, aye even the desire to be free. Please go away. I shall remain a shaven widow and a drudge.' And so she did.

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## THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE

**A** MBI WAS a man with three sons and five daughters, and yet there was no sign of an end to his wife Paru's fruitfulness. The worthy lady had begun motherhood at seventeen and had given birth to fourteen children by the time she was forty, and was now on the way to be delivered of a fifteenth. Six of her children had died; the rest had survived but only just survived. Poor things, they didn't get much to eat. Ambi's father had left him no property, and Ambi himself had no regular occupation. He used to do odd jobs like eating at death anniversaries, and marriage feasts and acting as Amen priest, land agent, arbitrator in petty disputes and broker of firewood carts, etc., whenever opportunity occurred. All these sources of income put

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together did not amount to much, and therein lay the reason of the semi-starvation.

Paru had once been healthy and strong. Constant confinements had, however, made her weak and sickly. Owing to her abject poverty she had to work upto the very day of her confinement and from the eleventh day after it, and her diet during the period was as usual, very poor. She used to give the best of the food to her husband and the next best to her children, reserving to herself only the crumbs and the waste. The food itself was, scientifically regarded, most unsatisfactory, consisting as it did of mere carbohydrates and entirely lacking in fat or proteids. No wonder that, in the absence of these bone and tissue building elements, the children grew up rickety, weak and anaemic. Till the babies were three years old they lived almost entirely on their mother's milk. Paru had but little milk,

thanks to her malnutrition and worries. But since there was no money to buy milk or artificial food, the only way to stop the babies' piercing cries was by suckling them. Often, not getting an abundant supply, they would bite and pull her breasts which were full of scars and wounds. Then, blindly, she would beat or pinch them, the brute in her getting the better of the mother. A moment later, she would repent and again fondle her offspring, and allow them to play havoc with her once more. Her stream of children demanded continuous suckling, a drain which her half-starved constitution could not stand. Her first pregnancy had been a period of expectancy and pride. When she had the baby she was really a radiant mother. The later deliveries and the semi-starvation of the babies had taken away this glamour. By the time she gave birth to her fourth child she

had begun to hate confinements. Pregnancy meant to her, thereafter, an unspeakable horror, a consequence of sins in past births. But her husband would not deny himself the only pleasure in life he had. Nor did she urge him to forego that. So, further confinements followed as a matter of course. Whenever she complained that another unwanted baby was on its way he would reply, 'What are we to do? It is all God's will. Can we have or withhold babies as we like?' Paru believed in his theory. In those days the Indian villagers had not heard of contraceptives and, even if they had heard of them, would have rejected them as sinful. So, the only remedy for Paru was to pray to God, whenever she was pregnant, that she might die before the next delivery, so that she might be saved from the horror of seeing one more hungry mouth crying for food and not getting it; and this

she did regularly from her fifth pregnancy onwards. God did not heed her prayer. Once Ambi overheard it and said, 'Poor thing! You don't know the ways of Providence. God acts only when He likes and as He likes, and cannot be moved by feeble outpourings of hysterical women like you.' Paru, however, believed that God was amenable to prayers. 'He does not lose much by granting my prayer. Why should He not grant it?' asked she. 'It is not a question of loss or gain,' said Ambi. 'Every person has to work out his *Karma*, you yours and I mine. We won't be allowed to quit this world one minute before the ordained time, any more than a prisoner will be released before his term is over.' 'A cruel law this,' she said. 'The laws of Providence are cruel,' he replied. Nothing pleased him so much as to interpret the ways of Providence.

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When the fifteenth baby was in sight, Paru said to Ambi one day, 'Alas, I am again in the family way. Why does God give us so many children without the wherewithal to maintain them? It is sheer cruelty to give us infants and then allow them to starve.' 'The ways of Providence are cruel but they ultimately work out all right, not necessarily for the individual but certainly for the universe at large,' said Ambi. 'For all acts of God there must be a reason and a remedy. Children are His gifts. He will provide for them in the way He deems best.' 'So, He deems it best to half-starve them?' asked Paru. 'That follows,' said Ambi. 'It is very strange,' said Paru. 'The ways of Providence *are* strange,' said Ambi. 'And, to add to the tragedy, your income is now even less than before,' said Paru. 'Yes,' said Ambi. 'Competition has increased. Formerly, I was the only firewood

broker. Now there are three. The commission has, of course, decreased. What is more the other two offer buttermilk drinks to the cartmen. We can't afford to give them. When, for the sake of attracting custom, we started storing buttermilk to give such drinks, you know the children used to drink up the whole long before any cart was sighted, and no amount of beating weaned them of the habit. The disappointed cartmen were furious and thought that we had tricked them. Thereafter we stopped offering such drinks to the cartmen, most of whom, therefore, naturally prefer the other two brokers. Where there were two land agents before there are five now, and parties negotiate directly in most cases. In several instances we give information to the would-be purchasers or sellers and they begin negotiations with each other leaving us in the cold. So we five have

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to fight for the very few cases in which sellers and purchasers requisition our services till the end. For these we fight harder than dogs do for bones. No wonder the income is paltry. Arbitration in petty disputes is, since the advent of the *Panchayat* courts, rarely sought for; besides, more respectable people take to this line now, people who need not fear the courts or the police, and what chance have paupers like me? Death and marriage feasts are now going out of fashion. And Amen priests are so plenty that their emoluments have stood at half anna per head for the last quarter of a century while all other payments have increased. What is more, one gets his chance only once in a way. The times are becoming very hard. Why, the other day I took our Santam, hardly ten years old, with me to the rich landlord's house where I was chaplain for some days in the place of the

permanent incumbent. The landlord refused Santam meals and asked him to clear out.' 'Hard hearted man ! ' said Paru. 'What are his riches for ? Will he take them with him when he dies ?' 'At any rate he told me that they were not for distribution among paupers and their progeny,' said Ambi. 'Why don't you learn cooking and become a cook ? That occupation is fairly remunerative,' said Paru. 'I cook ? Impossible !' The men who could eat what I cook have yet to be born. You know that,' replied her husband. 'I won't say that you are far wrong,' said Paru. 'Well, now, let us come to the main problem. As our resources have diminished, our family has increased. Don't you think that a large number of children is an evil ?' 'It is only the stream of children that has kept our country alive,' said Ambi. 'Neither her climate nor her situation would have pre-

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vented her from being colonized by invaders to the extinction of her original inhabitants. The dense population literally left no space for them to settle in. So the country and its ancient civilization are safe. The greatest advocates of birth control, the European nations and the U.S.A., are, according to our headmaster, increasing far more rapidly than we do and still regretting their slow increase. A hundred years ago the non-white races were, it seems, twice as large in numbers as the whites in the world. Now they are about equal.' 'I think,' replied Paru, 'that we are not rendering any great service to the country by giving birth to fourteen and burying six than by producing eight and keeping them all. Coming to the alleged service itself, if we are helping the country, should it not in turn help us by preventing six from going to a premature grave through malnutrition, and

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by feeding the remaining eight children who are part of its bulwarks? Yet, what aid has the state or any politician given to us?' she added. 'None. But, of late, philanthropic movements are afoot. Srimati Sarvopakari is advertising in the papers that she wants to get into touch with poor mothers having numerous children so that she may help them. Why not try her?' said her husband. 'I have never begged yet,' said Paru. 'Still, for the sake of the poor children, I will do so.'

Paru kept her promise. She went and saw Srimati Sarvopakari when that lady was in the midst of some friends. She was warmly received and asked to take all her children privately to the kindly lady the next day. 'Let me see the poor dears and what they want,' said Sarvopakari. 'Now, do sit down and take a cup of tea.' Paru was overwhelmed with the kindness, and, when she

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returned after receiving a gracious parting smile, she was all praise for the philanthropist. 'She is the kindest woman I have met,' said she to her husband. 'Perhaps you are right, and Providence does provide in some way for the helpless. It is a pity I didn't go to her before.' The next day she went with all her eight children to Sarvopakari, dressing them in their raggedest in order to elicit the great lady's full sympathy. She was ushered into the august woman's presence in her magnificently furnished private room, and it struck her that Sarvopakari was not half as genial then as when surrounded by friends. With a stern voice she asked Paru, fixing her with her eyes, 'Are all these children yours, or are they ragamuffins gathered by you for the purpose of stealing charity?' 'They are not ragamuffins, nor do I want your hypocritical charity,' said Paru, angrily gathering her

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children together and turning her back on the big lady with wrath and contempt. 'Don't get angry. I was only testing you,' said Sarvopakari in the sweetest voice possible. 'You do not know how many women try to deceive me by passing off ragamuffins gathered at random as their children. We public workers have to be rather careful lest the money intended for the poor should go to cheats.' Paru's anger cooled, and she thought that the reason given was true. Going downstairs to the hall where many friends and visitors were waiting, Sarvopakari loudly asked her secretary to bring fifteen rupees. This the secretary did in whole rupees, and making as great a jingling with them as possible, the philanthropist handed them over one by one, to Paru saying, 'My dear, your mothers are the trustees of our country's future. It is not much I can give you. It is

only a paltry fifteen rupees. But, whenever you are in need, don't be ashamed to come round.' Paru left with profuse thanks. The pomp and vainglory in Sarvopakari repelled her, but she had no doubt that the woman was charitable and, to a large extent, deserved the praise showered on her.

Three months later, when the fifteenth baby had come and gone, and she was unusually hard up and two of her children were down with fever, Paru again went to see Sarvopakari. On three successive days she found the lady not at home and on the fourth day was bluntly told by her in the solitude of her chamber, 'No use your becoming greedy and coming again. Honest labour is more praiseworthy than taking the doles of charity. Besides, if I give always to one, how can I give to all those who deserve? A

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fountain has to quench the thirst of all and not to water a desert.' 'I came because of my great need and because you were good enough to ask me to come whenever I was in need,' said Paru, her spirit humbled at the great necessity of getting some money for the relief of her sick children. 'Of course, of course,' said Sarvopakari, 'but, unfortunately, my means are limited and the applicants are many. So I must help those in greater need in preference to yourself.' Paru was tongue-tied. She knew that this woman was really heartless and was giving charity for the sake of fame. But how could she abuse her after receiving her aid once? The shame and cowardice of a beggar made her slink away. The secretary met her at the gate, and, seeing her sad face, said, 'Sarvopakari gives only once to any person, for she wants to have a formidable list of beneficiaries.'

The fever of one of the two children, Paru's oldest surviving son, proved fatal owing to lack of food and reserve vitality. To perform the funeral obsequies according to custom and thus escape excommunication, Ambi had to borrow twentyfive rupees at fifteen per cent interest. 'If we had had that much money before, the poor boy would not have died,' said Paru to Ambi. 'But who would have lent it us then?' asked he. 'It is because this is an unavoidable expense and one prescribed in the scriptures that the money has been lent. Now the problem is how to discharge the debt. I must seek some charitable individual.' 'Some Sarvopakari,' said Paru. 'Well, even she is not so bad as you think. She only represents the vain and empty set of philanthropists whose only motive in giving is to noise abroad their charitable acts. Such persons will not save a

drowning man without witnesses. They give charity on business principles, building a mansion of fame here below and growing angel's wings up above. But there are exceptions, and I want to search for them. I prefer Associations ; they make gifts more readily since nobody feels an individual sense of loss. The recipients too are less obliged, since a corporation has no soul and does not, therefore, extort either gratitude in this world or wings in the other,' said Ambi.

Acting on this principle, Ambi wandered all over the adjacent town the next day in search of charitable individuals and associations. One of the first things which attracted his eye was a newly emblazoned board on a handsome building announcing that it was the headquarters of the local Discharged Prisoners' Association and adding 'All discharged prisoners helped here.' 'If there is

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so much eagerness to help the ex-convicts, surely an honest man in need must be welcome indeed here,' thought Ambi. So he stepped in and was confronted by a smiling young man. 'Who is in charge of this place?' asked Ambi. 'I am the secretary,' said the other affably. 'I am badly in need of help,' said Ambi. 'When were you discharged?' asked the secretary. 'I never went to jail,' said Ambi with dignity. 'Sorry, I can't help you, then,' was the reply. 'Good gracious! You don't mean to say that you won't help a man unless he commits a crime and goes to jail?' said Ambi. 'That is the rule,' replied the other. 'The ways of man are even stranger than the ways of Providence,' said Ambi, to the great perplexity of the secretary, and departed.

Some days later, there was a commotion all over the countryside round Ambi's village

at the news that the Health and Baby Week was to be celebrated in the adjacent town on a grand scale. Mothers and babies would be honoured and given valuable presents of money, clothes and food, so went the rumour. Eagerly, Paru took her last three children, who were below five, and went to the place where the celebrations were on. To her surprise, the mothers and most of the babies got nothing. Out of one hundred and twenty babies three were adjudged the healthiest by the judges and awarded valuable prizes. The remaining 117 were neither bathed nor fed, nor given any gifts. The judges passed by Paru's ill-clad, famished children with scorn and loathing in their faces. When the awards were announced, Paru was furious. Going to the judges, she asked, 'Is their health not merely an accident of birth and circumstances? Are the means of the parents

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taken into account? Does not your present practice give the child of rich parents a prize on one day in addition to its good feed on all the three hundred and sixty-five days, and insult numerous mothers and children merely because the parents have no money to feed their children properly? Is competition among tender babes good? What about the heart-burning of the disappointed mothers? Are children to be assembled as in a cattle-show and the plumpest alone given prizes? Are intelligence, industry, character, not to count at all? Again, can any of you say that you were solely guided by health and not also or even mainly by complexion and expression? What chance has a healthy black baby with thick protruding lips against a less healthy but fair-skinned and handsome baby? Do you hope to secure praise on earth or places in heaven by giving

to those who roll in plenty and refusing to those who are in want?' The judges shrugged their shoulders and said, 'We have not thought about these things and we don't think that there is any need to. Go away, you silly woman. Who will give prizes to such scarecrows as your specimens?' 'Sirs,' said Paru, 'now, by these remarks, you have confirmed my opinion. Only when health and baby welfare workers make such scarecrows as my children impossible will they deserve the gratitude of the country. Starve these prize babies as mine have been starved, and they will be even worse scarecrows.' She then indignantly left the premises, anger in her face, despair in her heart.

As soon as she reached home, she resolved that never more should she have a child. She told this firmly to her husband and asked!

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him to sleep apart from her. 'What?' said he with wonder, 'a wife to sleep separately and refuse to have more children? Am I dreaming or waking?' 'Waking. It was I who was dreaming till now,' said Paru. 'But the country? What will become of the country if all do like this?' said he. 'Let the country be colonized by foreigners. No pity need be wasted on a race which will not help itself though it has got the capacity to do so,' said his wife. 'Paru, you are becoming a revolutionary,' said Ambi. 'Yes, circumstances have made me one,' she replied. 'You won't obey me and go on as before?' he asked. 'Never,' said she. 'Not even if I earn enough to maintain ourselves and the children comfortably?' asked Ambi. 'Well, I might consider doing so then. But that time is not yet,' said Paru. 'I can't understand why you, my wife, treat me thus.' 'It is one of the ways-

of Providence to reform you.' 'I will not be reformed.' 'Then, seek another wife.' 'Who will wed me, penniless, old, and cursed with a wife and a heap of children?' 'So far as I can see, none.' 'Then, what am I to do?' 'Resign yourself to the inevitable.' 'The ways of Providence are strange,' said Ambi, 'I never thought that my own wife would treat me like this.' 'The ways of livelihood are at present of more moment to me than the ways of Providence. Think of provisions, and Providence will take care of itself,' said Paru. 'The difficulty is that we have more children than we can ever hope to maintain properly,' said her husband. 'Then, we should not have got them.' 'Providence gave them to us.' 'It would not have done so unless we had asked for them. It will take them all back unless we work and earn enough to keep them alive,' said Paru. 'What can we do?' asked her

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husband. 'Let us first stop asking for more children and thus prevent our liabilities from growing. Next, let us earnestly set to work to earn enough to feed our existing ones,' replied Paru. 'What work can I do other than what I am doing now?' asked he. 'Go hawking clothes in the villages in summer; dig in the backyard and cultivate vegetables and plantains in winter. I too will earn something by sewing. Between the two of us we can earn enough to keep the family,' said she. 'Your will be done!' said Ambi. 'It will mean a new life for me.' 'That is exactly what you want.' 'Still, I never thought that Providence would have been so hard on me. The more I think of them, the more mysterious appear the ways of Providence,' said Ambi. 'That is as it should be,' said Paru, 'for, the man who is obsessed by Providence hardly provides for himself, and consequently comes to grief.'

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## UMASUNDARI, OR THE HEART OF A WOMAN

**P**ARTHASARATHI was a Brahmin commission agent at Madras, and exceedingly wealthy. His already enormous wealth had increased by leaps and bounds during the war, mainly through his dealings in kerosene. His principle then had been, like that of all other merchants, that when a neighbour's house is burning is the time to sell water dear. However bad the principle underlying this philosophy it succeeded very well, and that was all that Parthasarathi cared for. His crucial test for everything was whether success or failure had attended it. If success, he would applaud it; if failure, he would condemn it. No man had a more genuine contempt for moral standards. 'A king, even if he is a murderer, will be honour-

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ed and obeyed, provided he is strong and able. A rich man whose whole treasure is the result of a swindle, will still be courted by all. Men are ready to forget 'origins, provided they lead to something worth having.' This, in sum, was Parthasarathi's philosophy. Theft he condemned as being full of danger and destined to prove a failure in the long run. But cheating he regarded in quite a different light. 'The difference between theft and cheating is immense,' he used to declare to his companions. 'In theft, once the transaction is proved, all defence is worthless; in cheating, on the other hand, even after the transaction is proved, a thousand excellent defences can be put up.' This argument, coming from a person so thoroughly acquainted with cheating as Parthasarathi, naturally carried much weight.

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With all this, Parthasarathi was not a soured cynic. He was a man of much refinement, aesthetic taste and learning, for he considered all these essential to success. He had married a beautiful girl of poor family, not because of any ridiculous romantic views but after mature consideration. A beautiful wife he considered to be a great aid to success and also a singular proof of it. He preferred to marry a girl from a poor family, as she would never dare to oppose her rich husband. Parthasarathi's wife, who was a cypher but a very useful cypher all her life, died in giving birth to her second daughter, Umasundari, who, however, survived. Parthasarathi regretted wife's death, as a washerman would regret the death of his donkey, and moaned and cried out and wept as custom required.

He regarded this death as his first failure and resolved never to remarry and court such

failures again. If he wanted pleasure, and he did want it very often, he sought it outside matrimony.

He had only two children, both of them girls. The first was named Nityakalyani and the second Umasundari. The first was a rather plain, mediocre girl, while the second was surpassingly beautiful and extraordinarily intelligent. Parthasarathi loved them both passionately, but still preferred the second. And indeed none who saw Uma could help loving her. Her father gave her as well as her sister the best possible tutors, but while Uma profited by these immensely and became extremely proficient in learning, Kalyani only picked up enough to read and write haltingly. Kalyani had from her childhood a consuming envy of Uma's superior beauty and learning, which the passage of years only increased.

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Parthasarathi married his two daughters to cultured people in affluent circumstances, Kalyani to a prosperous lawyer called Ramaswami, and Uma to a young and brilliant professor named Sundar. Uma joined her husband when she was sixteen, and, till eighteen, her life was one of unalloyed joy. She loved her husband passionately and he seemed to reciprocate her love fully. Often they would go together to see famous places. Once Uma and Sundar started from Madras for Bombay as Sundar wanted to show his wife that great city. Owing to the crowd of travellers, Sundar and Uma were obliged to travel separately; Uma in the first class compartment reserved for ladies, and Sundar in the first class for men. The only other passenger in the ladies' compartment was a thickly veiled lady at whom Uma gazed half in pity and half in wonder. As soon as the

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train had begun to move, the veiled lady lifted her veil and revealed a beautiful but terribly sad face. Uma gazed at her like one fascinated. 'Sister,' said she, 'why are you so sad?' 'Because of my married misery,' replied the other. 'What!' said Uma, 'why should your married life be a misery? Is not marriage the gate to Heaven on earth?' 'Very often it is a gate to Hell,' was the reply. 'Marriage is a gamble in which all women lose at one time or other. We are toys whose fates depend on our husbands. Put not your faith in husbands. Their love is fickle, their capacity for evil unlimited. Sooner or later, they mar our lives. Often, death is our only refuge, as you will live to learn.' 'I am happy,' said Uma. 'Yes, now, but wait,' said the other. 'Who are you?' asked Uma impressed, in spite of herself. 'I am the Rani of Amaravati,' said the

other. 'Is even a princess's married life unhappy, then?' asked Uma surprised. 'Ah,' said the Rani, 'you too are a victim of the common delusion. Outward grandeur and gaiety, but inward sorrow unbounded, this is our lot. The life of an Indian Rani is more unhappy than that of her poor sister. We are often treated worse than the courtesans who gain the Raja's favour. I would give the best year of my life to see my daughter wedded to a cultured commoner instead of to a pampered Raja. But I don't believe that any marriage can be perfectly happy. Sooner or later will come the inevitable crash, the crumpling of the woman's heart. Then, death is her only refuge; you will learn that too, in time.' 'I hope not,' said Uma. 'I wish indeed that you may be happy all your life,' replied the Rani. 'You are fair as a flower, light as the wind, tender

as a creeper and guileless as an angel, but, alas, I dare not hope unbroken happiness even for you. Now, I must get down,' she added, and, putting on her heavy veil, she alighted at the next station and went away, accompanied by a hundred attendants and music of various kinds, leaving Uma to ponder over her words.

Uma could not forget this incident, though she tried to laugh it away. She related it to her husband and saw that somehow he was vexed and perturbed. 'Dearest, why bother over an unfortunate woman's empty vapourings?' said Uma to Sundar, but neither he nor she could regard the words of the Rani of Amaravati as mere empty vapourings. Often in the most unexpected moment the words of the Rani would haunt Uma, and a cold shiver would pass through her frame. 'I wish I had never met the woman,' said

Uma to herself. 'Her words seem the grim foreboding of some evil to come.'

But for a year nothing came. Uma's life was most happy. Then Parthasarathi died. Of late, Parthasarathi's affairs had gone to the dogs. He had lost heavily in trade and speculation, and in order not to frighten Uma and Kalyani, he had kept up his expensive style of living and pretended that his finances were as sound as ever. When he died, however, his liabilities were as great as his assets. Nityakalyani and her husband and Sundar felt this loss of expected inheritance very keenly, but Uma missed Parthasarathi more than his money.

Two months later, Sundar obtained a well paid professorship at Calcutta and left for that city. He did not wish Uma to come till he had seen what the place was like and had settled down there. So, with many kisses

and embraces and tears, he parted from his beloved wife who remained with Kalyani as her guest. Sundar had been considerably upset by Parthasarathi's leaving no fortune behind, and his tenderness towards Uma had somewhat diminished, but Uma put that down to grief at Parthasarathi's death, as the professor's tears of chagrin at the loss of expected wealth had always borne the appearance of tears of sorrow for the departed. Sundar's grief at parting from Uma was, however, real. His intense love of his pure and beautiful wife reacted on him powerfully. He promised to send her daily letters and meant it at the time. For a time he sent fervent love letters daily and gladdened the heart of Uma. Soon, however, the letters came only twice a week and were much shorter. Uma attributed this at first to pressure of work, the excuse given in some of these love-

less epistles. The two letters a week became one and then entirely irregular, coming at long intervals, till, about seven months after Sundar's going to Calcutta, they stopped altogether. Uma's heart became steadily saddened. She wrote to her husband every day, letters that were love lyrics, full of tenderness, unselfishness and innocence. His cold formal replies chilled and frightened her. She implored her husband to send for her to Calcutta. No reply was received. She offered to come to Calcutta herself. A hurried line by return of post asked her not to come as he was not ready to receive her just then. Uma's pride too forbade her to go without being invited or sent for. Slowly, a rumour spread that Sundar was going to marry a Christian girl called Lucy Silverdale, after he had got rid of his faithful Hindu wife. Uma did not believe this scandal and waited

with a heavy heart for Sundar's call to come. Two months after the rumour had reached her, a registered letter arrived for Uma from Sundar. Uma was somewhat puzzled as to why a registered letter had been sent, but thought that this might be merely to ensure its receipt. Her heart throbbing, she tore open the envelope with trembling fingers and found a cold formal letter within, informing her that he, Sundar, had embraced Christianity and telling her that unless she was prepared to follow suit and join him within a month, he would get a divorce and take to himself another wife. As soon as she read it, poor Uma's head reeled, she remembered the Rani's words, 'Marriage is a gamble in which all women lose at one time or other. We are toys whose fates depend on our husbands. Often death is our only refuge,' and uttering an agonized cry, she fainted. Ramaswamy,

followed by Kalyani, hurried to the spot, picked up the letter, read it, coloured uttered a volley of abuse against Sundar, and then helped his wife to bring Uma back to consciousness by pouring cold water on her face. When Uma opened her eyes, she remained like one dazed. Ramaswamy and Kalyani advised her to refuse to become a Christian and join her husband saying, ' Our great and holy religion should never be deserted for the alien religion of Christ simply because an abandoned wretch orders you to do so. Remain with us, and we will take care of you.' Uma's pride was wounded. Change of religion she did not mind so much, as she believed that all religions had more or less the same core of truth. But love she did care for. If only Sundar had come and implored her, or even if he had written a fervent love letter, a soul calling to a soul,

she would unhesitatingly have become a Christian and joined him. But this brazen epistle with its insulting coldness hurt her. 'Why should I thrust myself on one so anxious to get rid of me?' she thought, and forthwith wrote a letter of refusal and went and shut herself up alone for some time in a room, adding, 'I want to be alone for some little time to get over this terrible shock.' As soon as she had gone, Kalyani said to her husband, 'With all her beauty, and learning, this is Uma's fate,' and there was the slightest suggestion of gloating in her voice as she said this.

In course of time, Uma heard about the marriage of Sundar and Lucy, and the latter had even the bad taste to send her an invitation card beautifully printed. Lucy's defence was that she did not want the validity of her marriage questioned by Uma. When Uma

saw the card, she was so full of grief and shame that she cried out to Mother Earth to open Her bosom and swallow her up as She did Sita of yore. But in this Iron Age no miracles happen, and Mother Earth made no response.

Days passed, and Uma's life became more sad. She remained with Kalyani and Ramaswamy, whose love for her diminished day by day. Kalyani wanted Uma to cast off her costly *sarees* and jewels, as these were not meant for a husbandless woman like her. Uma was slighted, neglected and pointed at with scorn by all the neighbouring women. Her life became a burden and a nightmare to her. Often she said to herself. 'I wish that some Hindu, however low, would marry me!' But no one did so; the suicidal genius of modern Hinduism guaranteed that. Hundreds were attracted by Uma's dazzling

beauty and intelligence to make improper advances to her. Every post brought her filthy letters from all sorts of fellows ranging from low rowdies to fashionable rakes in high position. 'Mountains of lust, not one atom of love,' said Uma, and her eyes filled with tears. Kalyani blamed her for these unwanted letters and told her that she would be sent out of her house if she continued to get them. 'What am I to do? I never ask for them,' said Uma with tears. 'Shave your head and put on a white robe, and the letters will cease of themselves,' was Kalyani's retort. Uma wept as if her heart would break. She wished that she were dead, but had not the courage to commit suicide. Nor had she the heart to part with her flowing hair or beautiful *sarees*.

While her heart was thus bleeding, Jacob, Ramaswamy's chauffeur, made her an offer of marriage and complete freedom to follow her

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religious rites. Uma snatched at the offer, not because she loved the man, but because this was the only man who offered her marriage and freedom from the hell in which she was living. She, therefore, eloped with Jacob, who left Ramaswamy's service and became the driver of a bus. Kalyani and Ramaswamy raved and fumed and cursed Uma and called her all kinds of foul names behind her back.

Jacob was a Roman Catholic, and he wanted to marry Uma according to Catholic rites. The priest insisted that Uma should abandon her heathenism as he called it. Uma argued with him and pointed out that in the Bhagavad-Gita Sri Krishna had said that from whatever side and in the whatever form people worshipped God they would reach Him. The priest contemptuously brushed aside this argument, saying that outside Christ and the Catholic church there was no salvation, add-

ing Jesuitically that this was also safe for her, since if Krishna were God she would be saved even if she worshipped Him in the Catholic manner, whereas, should the God of the Bible turn out to be the real God, she would be condemned to eternal Hell-fire if she did not worship Him after the Christian fashion. Uma was disgusted by this sophistry and intolerance, but Jacob, to whom she appealed for help, was too greatly in fear of the priest to intercede on her behalf. She had advanced too far to retreat with safety. So she became converted to Catholicism and was married to Jacob by the exultant priest. Her heart was sore. But her sorrows had not ended. Jacob, after the first week of the honeymoon was over, lost his passion for her and preferred the bottle and his old flames to her. Poor Uma found some consolation in singing religious songs. But the priest

forbade her to sing them, as they were Heathen, Pagan, anti-Christian and smacking of Hell Fire. Her husband sided with the priest, saying that if she did not stop singing these songs, he would be forced to cast her out of his house, a prospect which he did not seem to contemplate with any sorrow. Perforce, Uma had to give up her songs. Vexed in mind, she said to herself, 'Marriage is a gamble where all women lose at one time or other. Why was I born? Why did I marry?' Her heart grew sadder, and she regretted that she had left Kalyani's house. She had never seen Kalyani again after she eloped.

She feared to meet her. But her life was so miserable now that she wanted to see her sister, the only blood-relation she had in the whole world, and, in the name of their common father, to unburden her heart with its pent up sorrow to her

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So, one day, she went to Kalyani's house and, accosting her sister, said to her 'Oh, Kalyani my heart is bleeding.' 'Don't talk to me, you wretch,' replied Kalyani, 'you who have deserted Hinduism and Bharata-varsha.' 'I did not desert them willingly, I was thrust out,' said Uma weeping bitterly. 'Get away, a gulf divides you and me,' said Kalyani. 'You mean wealth and religion?' asked Uma. 'Yes, and morality too,' replied Kalyani. 'You immoral wretch, you are worse than a prostitute, for she at least does not pretend to be moral like you. Get out of my sight!' and she ran back into the house and shut the door in Uma's face.

Uma staggered, and the ominous words came to her mind: 'Marriage is a gamble, in which all women lose at one time or other. We are all toys whose fates depend on our husbands Their love is fickle, their capacity

for evil unlimited. Sooner or later, they mar our lives. Often, death is our only refuge, and you; too will live to learn it.' 'Umé, Umé,' she said to herself, 'no use your living one moment more after this.' Going to the well she flung herself into it and died, saying, 'The old religion I abandoned, the old Gods I gave up worshipping, the old temples I deserted, the old songs I ceased to sing, may they forgive poor Uma! May God forgive me and my poor husband Sundar for our sins, and may He make the life of women like me less of a Hell in Bharatavarsha!'

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